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Thursday June 25, 2015

Tour de France

148 page special issue

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ANDRE GREIPEL OF TEAM LOTTO SOUDAL
at the Tour of Flanders 2015.
Photo: © Tim De Waele

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THIS ISSUE 25/06

The best time of the year

We're nearly there. It's now just nine days until the start of the Tour de France and this week we bring you the world's most up-to-date guide to the big race, the route, the teams and the lowdown on all the major contenders.

It's set to be one of the closest Tours in years, with a four-way battle between Chris Froome, Vincenzo Nibali, Nairo Quintana and Alberto Contador. They've all had completely different build-ups, with Froome and Quintana particularly under-raced, as opposed to Contador who is recovering after his Giro d'Italia victory. Defending champ Nibali is doing exactly what he did last year, riding gradually into form.

It's an exciting time to be a bike race fan and this is always my favourite edition of the year. For me it's a perfect time to bow out as editor. Having enjoyed 37 years working for the magazine with 17 of those as editor, this will be my last issue.

I am proud to have been only the 12th editor since the magazine began in 1891 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every reader who has purchased a copy over the years. By my calculations that's almost 2,000 issues and more than 100,000 pages.

I leave *Cycling Weekly* in the very capable hands of an extremely skilled and talented team, now led by Simon Richardson.



Photos: Graham Watson

Robert Garbutt
Editor

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Thomas narrowly misses win in Switzerland

Sky rider second by a "gutting" five seconds

Hugh Gladstone

Welshman Geraint Thomas bolstered his confidence ahead of the Tour de France when he finished second overall in the Tour de Suisse last week. The 29-year-old Sky rider rode prominently throughout the nine-day race to finish five seconds behind Katusha's Simon Spilak in the overall standings.

Spilak claimed the honours with a strong ride in the final 38.4km time trial in Fabian Cancellara's hometown of Bern on Sunday. But the rider who was sounding perhaps the loudest warning shot ahead of the Tour was Giant-Alpecin's Tom Dumoulin.

The 24-year-old Dutchman blitzed the final race against the clock to better Spilak and Cancellara and put himself amongst the favourites to pull on the first yellow jersey of the Tour, when it starts with a 13.8km time trial on his home soil in Utrecht on Saturday July 4.

FDJ's Thibaut Pinot was another rider showing pre-Tour form, winning the queen mountain stage to Rettenbachgletscher last Wednesday, and taking the race lead. Although he was still leading going into the race's final stage, the Frenchman is not renowned for his time trialling and was overhauled by Spilak, Thomas and Dumoulin.

Thomas, who is now ranked sixth in the WorldTour, took five top-10 stage finishes on his way to the overall podium, and should head to the Tour after this weekend's National Championships reassured of his condition.

"I was on the ball all through the race," said Thomas, who'll ride at the Tour in a support of Chris Froome. "There wasn't really much I could have done to change what I did. It was maybe only the last few metres on the queen stage where Spilak gained that bit of time on me.

"It's still gutting to not get the win but it's been a decent season and I think I've definitely made that next step up."

Contador has the edge over Tour rival

With the Giro d'Italia already under his belt, Alberto Contador showed he's maintained form ahead of the Tour de France, with a win over key rival Nairo Quintana at the Route de Sud in the French Pyrenees on Sunday.

The Spaniard built his victory with a stage win over the mountains into Luchon on last Saturday. However, having failed to drop Quintana on the climb, it was through attacking on the final descent of the Port de Bales that Contador gained his edge on the small Colombian.

While the question for Contador is whether he'll be able to hold winning condition for another five weeks, Quintana's been playing his cards significantly closer to his chest. Having last raced at the Tour of Romandy, he's spent recent weeks training at home at altitude.

Speaking after the race, Quintana insisted he was happy with his condition and simply wasn't prepared to take any risks ahead of the Tour by following Contador's downhill attack.

"There are bigger tasks to come in July," he told *CW*. "I could match Contador on the climb but I wasn't prepared to risk it on the descent."

Overall, Contador won the race by 17 seconds from Quintana with young Frenchman Pierre-Roger Latour (Ag2r La Mondiale) rounding out the podium.

"I'm happy with this victory at the Route du Sud but this doesn't change anything in view of the Tour de France," he said. "We still have another 13 days until the start of the Tour de France and I will keep my focus on my preparation, in order to reach the start in the best shape possible."

Photo: Cor Vos

MY VIEW...



Hugh Gladstone

***Cycling Weekly* news editor**

The pre-Tour stage races are done and dusted and Froome, Contador and Quintana have all shown well. Now there's just the various National Championships this week to offer any last minute indicators of form. That's where Nibali revealed his last year.

Eroica Brittania welcomes retro riders

Peak District hosts second vintage cycling festival



Hannah Reynolds

Over 3,600 riders took to the roads of the Peak District last weekend where Britain's most 'handsome' cycling event, the Eroica Brittania, took place.

Now in its second year on these shores — having been inspired by its Italian counterpart — this celebration of vintage cycling culminating in a sportive is hugely popular and draws visitors from around the world.

A quintessentially British festival — a summer fayre through nostalgia-tinted glasses with both glamour and a touch of the WI cake competition — is perhaps best described as a romanticised jumbling of many bygone eras.

In just one year the festival site has grown by a third to cope with demand and presented three days of family fun including, a family ride, a vintage family sports day, the Great British Beach and a vintage fairground including a helter-skelter and steam gallopers.

A bike jumble did a roaring trade selling vintage and retro bikes and parts. Many visitors left shaking their heads with regret as they realised their old bike, thrown away in exchange for a shiny new carbon model, is now worth a fortune.

With strict rules on what is vintage, every bike ridden in the event had to be built previous to 1987 with no modern components or clipless pedals allowed. Most riders applied the same rules to their outfits, on and off the bike, modelling everything from tweed plus-fours through to loud 1980s Lycra.

Some even matched their outfits to the original use of the bike, getting fully into character. A schoolmaster was seen flying past with cloak billowing and cane waving; later a butcher on his butcher's bike complete with sausages round his neck made his way to the finish arena. Malcolm Elliott turned out in his old Teka kit and Britain's first Tour de France stage winner, Brian Robinson, led out the ride in a woollen jersey from the 1950s.

The riders travelled between villages of the Peak to replenish and refuel at 'feast-stops'. Villagers put on huge spreads, turning their villages into mini-festivals in their own right with music, entertainment, singing and dancing along the route.



Froome's marginal gain motorhome plan stalls

Team Sky's plan to put Chris Froome up in a motorhome at the Tour de France was thwarted when cycling's governing body, the UCI, rushed through a new technical regulation last week that asserted: "Riders must stay in the hotels provided by the organiser throughout the entire duration of the race" to "reaffirm absolute fairness between all riders." Claiming significant benefits, Richie Porte had test run Sky's latest marginal gain during his ill-fated Giro d'Italia quest. While Froome responded with a sarcastic tweet ("Good going @UCI_cycling #progress") the governing body would likely have been more alarmed by Tour de France organiser, ASO, threatening to pull their six races from the UCI programme next year unless it sees sufficient progress in the restructuring of the calendar.

Sky man helps Belarus to double-gold

Team Sky's Vasil Kiryienka won one of two golds for Belarus at the inaugural European Games, in Baku, Azerbaijan. Kiryienka's victory in the 51.6km individual time trial was followed by sprint finish success for compatriot, Alena Amialiusik, in the women's road race. Spain's Luis León Sánchez won the 215.8km men's road race to go with his bronze in the time trial, while Netherlands's Ellen Van Dijk secured the women's time trial by a margin of 36 seconds on the 25.8km course.

Greipel returns to form

André Greipel (Lotto-Soudal) warmed up for the Tour de France by winning two stages, the points and overall classification at the Ster ZLM Tour in the Netherlands. The German sprinter also came second in the final fourth stage, won by Ireland's Matt Brammeier (MTN-Qhubeka). At the Tour of Slovenia, Sky's Mikel Nieve finished second, five seconds behind the winner of the queen stage, the Slovenian Primož Roglič (Adria Mobil).



Photo: PA Wire/Press Association Images

Brit stage success bookends Brennauer's Tour triumph

Building on last year's edition was always going to be difficult, but the Aviva Women's Tour delivered

Owen Rogers

Lizzie Armitstead (Boels-Dolmans) and Hannah Barnes (United Health Care) bookended the Aviva Women's Tour with British stage success last week, but it was Germany's Lisa Brennauer (Velocio-SRAM) who took overall victory in Milton Keynes on Sunday. The world time trial champion was the most consistent rider throughout the five-day race, winning the penultimate stage into Stevenage and finishing inside the top six each day.

Brennauer had to work hard and credited her team with the win. "Everyone wanted the jersey," she told *Cycling Weekly*. "I'm so happy we could defend it, but it was due to the awesome work of my team-mates, I have to admit that. They always brought me back."

The success of the race might have been derailed when Armitstead crashed out (see page 14) but the second edition of the event drew out large crowds and served up excitement and drama.

Whereas last year Marianne Vos dominated, winning the final three stages, the more challenging *parcours* around the east of England this year made the race less predictable. Despite each



Barnes (far left) gives home fans a treat on stage five

stage ending in a sprint, on three occasions the early break was only foiled in the final kilometre. And With Jolien D'hoore and Christine Majerus also taking wins, each stage saw a different winner and the race lead was held by four different riders.

While a Belgian, Luxembourger and German dominated the results for the three middle days, Barnes's final stage victory after a tough day in the Chilterns gave the home fans something to cheer about again.

"I made sure I was in a good position going into the bottom of the climbs," she explained. "The sprint was crazy, really difficult. I got boxed with about 300 metres to go, but thankfully it opened up and I was able […] to get maximum watts."

MY VIEW...



Owen Rogers

Cycling Weekly contributor

"The final stage exemplified the entire race. With fierce attacks for both the stage and GC, it was action throughout, before the break was brought back in the final metres. Organisers may need to vary the formula, but the Women's Tour is here to stay."

Guest column

Katie Archibald



"The horrible truth about time trials is that the person who comes last goes through just as much pain as the person who wins"

By the time this magazine comes out it'll be the day of the National Time Trial Championships (June 25). The main competition will likely come from within my own team and household. Notably there's fellow *CW* columnist Dame Sarah Storey. Into her second season of racing after having her baby girl, Louisa our 'team toddler', she's flying. Training for her Hour record attempt seemed to do wonders for her time trialling this season. However, will 21 miles have been long enough for Sarah to leave us all trailing behind? I fear it might be.

The other big hitters include Elinor Barker — the competition from within our house. As a junior she was world time trial champion (an intimidating fact I felt very aware of when I first started training with her) and she showed good form when we both rode the Women's Tour last week. Indeed, I was in a break with her on stage one and it just about killed me. If she brings those legs with her to the Nationals then my own will be trembling.

My final prediction is another team-mate of mine, Ciara Horne. I've seen her arse disappear into the distance on many a climb. The National TT course has quite a few punchy hills that Ciara will get stuck into.

So how am I going to try to match them? Well you wouldn't guess by looking at me, but I'm more of a descender than a climber which means I'm looking forward to half of the hills. And with all that training for the team pursuit — I'm a four-minute specialist — a couple of minutes in the red on those digs should be manageable. I also have every corner, every slope in the road and every pothole memorised.

When you fear you might not have it on strength, you've got to put everything into having a technically perfect ride. Whether it'll be enough I don't know. The horrible truth about time trials is that the person who comes last goes through just as much pain at the person who wins. If you're there watching, please cheer us all on!

Former swimmer Katie Archibald made a splash in cycling when she won her first team pursuit world title after just three years in the sport

Armitstead hoping for quick recovery

Appearance at Nationals still possible after Women's Tour crash



Owen Rogers

After crashing out of the Women's Tour last week, Lizzie Armitstead is hoping to make a speedy recovery in time for this weekend's National Championships.

The Boels-Dolmans rider won stage one in the Suffolk town of Aldeburgh last week, but it quickly went wrong when she veered and crashed into a line of photographers behind the finish.

"It looked like a gust of wind caught her, it was just horrible," said snapper Balint Hamvas.

Armitstead was treated at the scene for over 30 minutes, and it was initially thought she'd broken bones. But after being airlifted to hospital, the Olympic medalist was eventually given the all-clear.

"It is always hard when one of your riders crashes," Danny Stam, her team director told *CW*. "I could see she was in extreme pain and the doctor said she could have broken her pelvis. But when she spoke to me I knew it wasn't too bad."

Having had physiotherapy this week, Armitstead was hoping to train on Monday in readiness for the Nationals.

"If she can train for two or three days, then I'm sure she'll be in good shape." said Stam.

Both men's and women's road races take place on Sunday in Lincoln, with the time trials contested at nearby Cadwell Park on Thursday.

Laura Trott (Matrix Fitness) defends her road title, with Lucy Garner (Liv-Plantur), Hannah Barnes (United Healthcare), and Wiggle-Honda's Dani King among her rivals.

The men's race sees last year's winner Pete Kennaugh leading a five-strong Team Sky contingent. The Orica trio of Adam Blythe and Simon and Adam Yates, Mark Cavendish (Etixx-Quick Step), Steve Cummings (MTN-Qhubeka) and Alex Dowsett (Movistar) are also entered.

See www.nationalroad-champs.co.uk for further info.

Zappi prepares for Nationals pavé

Wresting the Under-23 National Championship crown away from JLT-Condor's Ed Laverack has been a yearly aim for one British U23 team.

Zappi's CC, who live and race across the Continent, have been fine-tuning plans for five months in a bid to go one better than last year when two of their then riders, Dan Pearson and Dante Carpenter, came second and third in Abergavenny.

Obsessing over the details of the Lincoln finishing circuit, notably Michaelgate's cobbles, four of the team's six riders — Scott Auld, Callum Ferguson, James Locker and James Newey — relocated from their Italian base to Ghent, in Belgium, earlier this month as part of an intense four-day training and racing block.

"We did a lot of cobbles in the streets of Portugal in February and March," coach Flavio Zappi recounted.

"I trained them how to race on the cobbles, what positions to take and how to get up them faster. So Belgium has been a refresher.

"Adding details is important [to race success] and the details of cobbles is huge."

Ferguson, 19, believes the preparation has been beneficial: "It's got us used to the cobbles and the hustle and bustle before the ascents up the climbs which we can expect in Lincoln."

"We're used to the climbs and cobbles now and because we race longer distances [in Italy] than those who are based in Belgium, the advantage lies with us," Auld, 18, said.

In a reversal of preparation, though, 22-year-old Ali Slater (An Post-Chain Reaction) has come back from Belgium: "to train on the real thing as I live so close to Lincoln."

Photo: Jered Gruber



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GB boys sprint to Beaumont Trophy success

National team prepare for upcoming championships

Snowdon Sports

With training well underway for the European Track Championships and the British Time Trial Championships, the GB national team displayed their versatility when they worked over their rivals in the Beaumont Trophy, where Chris Latham edged to victory in the 117-mile road race in Northumberland on Sunday.

The 21-year-old from Bolton was deposited perfectly for the group sprint by his team-mates Gabriel Cullaigh and Tao Geoghegan-Hart, as the GB boys left the usual domestic teams to fight it out for second spot, with Tom Stewart (Madison-Genesis) and Yanto Barker (One Pro Cycling) taking second and third respectively.

"There was plenty of cat-and-mouse, but with my team-mates Gabs [Cullaigh] and Tao [Geoghegan-Hart] in there I was confident," said Latham. "Tao went first and took me from 3km to 1km, then Gabs took over from there and led me in.

"We've had a hard week on the track training for the Europeans, but this fitted in well for us and it's good preparation for the British Time Trial Championship on Thursday."

Meanwhile, in the women's Curlew Cup on similar roads, Laura Massey (IKON-Mazda) won a sprint finish which saw her hold off four Giordana-Triton rivals. One of those, Women's Road Series leader Nicola Juniper, held onto her overall lead at the halfway point of the series with fifth place.

"I'm just happy to have won and finished ahead of Nikki," said Massey. "It's good timing for the National Road Race Championships."

The events were part of the Virgin Money Cyclone weekend which also included the Cyclone Challenge sportive and Tyne Six Bridges leisure ride.

Photo: Huw Williams, Virgin Money Cyclone

To do this week...

Enter Côte de Holme Moss sportive, July 4-5

To mark a year to the weekend since the Tour de France visited Yorkshire, this sportive offers three distances, including a 140km ride involving 3,300m of climbing. "It goes over many of the Tour roads and is very challenging," organiser Andrew Akers said.

Entry: £35 (£40 on the day). po.st/HolmeMoss



Relive last year's Grand Départ

Race Forza Cycles/Café Velo Summer Series, July 1

Pit yourself against some of the UK's best domestic riders in the sixth race of a 10-race summer series around the 1km Llandow circuit, just 15 miles from Cardiff. "We get a few of the NFTO boys lining up and on a dry evening we can get up to 120 racing," organiser David Bees said.

Entry: £15 cat 3/4 race or E/1/2/3 race. po.st/LlandowCircuit

Read *A Corinthian Endeavour* by Paul Jones

Hill-climb fanatic Paul Jones chronicles the history and prestige of the National Hill-Climb Championships, regaling stories of yesteryear from the uniquely British event that provides a gruelling end-of-season spectacle. Jones describes the Championships as "a tale of obsession, pain and asceticism... in the fight against the insidious grasp of gravity".

£13.95 from Amazon. po.st/HillClimbBook

Watch *King of the Mountain*

This moving online documentary about the Rwandan cycling team is just nine minutes long but has the potential to uplift and inspire. Focused on the life of rider Samuel Mugisha, the film shows how the African country is recovering from the 1994 genocide through the exploits of its national cycling team.

po.st/RwandanFilm

Photo: Jered Gruber

Weekly column

Rob Hayles



"The post-crash shower. That high-pitched sting that travels deep when the water hits raw flesh is as unpleasant as it gets"

I've managed to spend a few great hours of late down in our village's skate park with my son. It has brought back fond memories of my days as a lad either on my BMX or my trusty skateboard, stretching the boundaries, and pushing the envelope of my abilities — whether it was jumping the highest, or the farthest, or quite often both.

My six-year-old boy is fairly typical of a lad of his age, and quite probably a 'chip off the old block'.

The way he has improved on the scooter he got for last year's birthday is quite impressive, even if I do say so myself. He no longer sits back watching the bigger kids drop in off the high half pipe ramp, and take air over the humps. He is now part of the 'crew'. He's so proud to be part of the older boys' gang.

But this newfound bravery is not without its downsides — literally. The other day he ran over his own foot, sending him sprawling to the floor. With a gash on his cheek, and a graze on his shoulder, he picked himself up and pushed on, through only a handful of tears. The following day was much the same. On his last lap of the park, he disappeared behind a ramp. The only thing that came out the other side was his scream. I ran to help and found him on his side, holding his bloodied knee, tears rolling down his face.

On the way home, I mentally prepared him for what he was about to undergo. It's something most bike riders will have endured at one point or another: the post-crash shower. That high-pitched sting that travels deep when the water hits raw flesh is about as unpleasant as it gets.

There was fear on his face as he entered the bathroom. "It won't sting," I said, "but if it does, it'll only be for a few seconds".

Having been in this situation on many occasions, my empathy was strong. So as I pushed him into the shower I ran out to make a brew. Within a few seconds I heard his voice.

"Daddy!" he called. Here it comes, I thought. "You were right," he continued. "It doesn't sting".

Eh? In my day, I would have been in there wincing and hanging onto the towel rail with a vice like grip.

Maybe he's not such a 'chip off the old block' after all.

Former double world track champion, Rob Hayles is a pundit for TV and radio. He's also a coffee connoisseur and garden shed inventor

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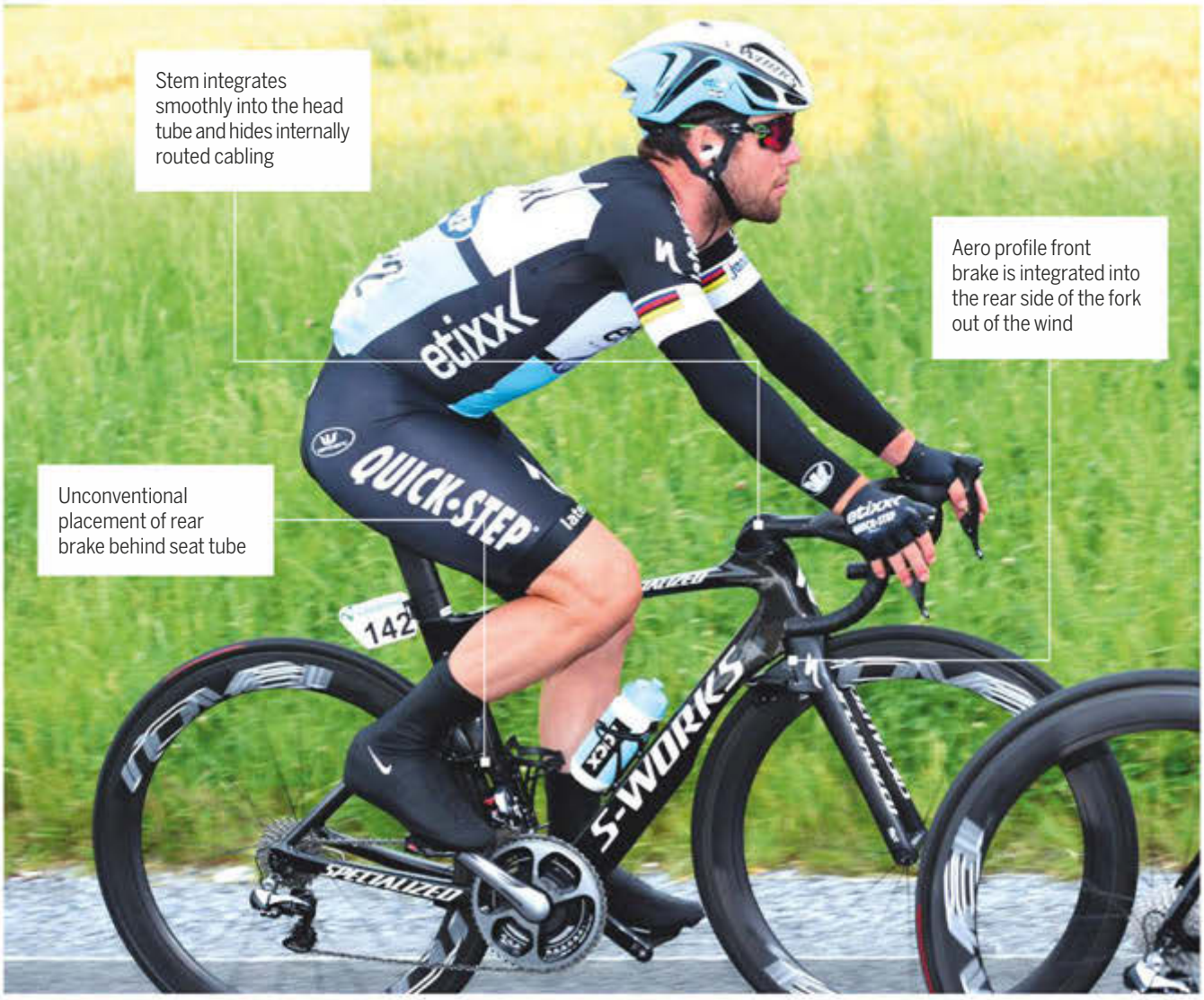


Photo: Graham Watson

Cav race-tests new Specialized

Aerodynamic bike gets try-out ahead of Tour

Oliver Bridgewood

Mark Cavendish took to a new stealthy-looking Specialized aero bike when he raced in the Tour de Suisse last week. With the Tour de France just around the corner, the Swiss race offers the opportunity for teams to race-test new equipment before the stakes are raised in July.

Specialized-sponsored teams appeared to be doing just that, with both Cavendish and Peter Sagan spotted riding the new machine on sprint stages — in the latter's case, to victory.

Specialized remains tight-lipped about the new bike, with no official details released, but it is possibly a new version of the Venge.

As on some other new aero bikes, the cockpit appears to have been redesigned, with a bladed aero handlebar, an integrated stem, and no visible cables. The bike also features dropped seatstays, similar to those found on other aero bikes such as the Merida Reacto, BMC Timemachine and Cervélo S5.

But most significantly, this new Specialized features completely redesigned brakes, neatly integrated into the frame to further reduce drag.

Rather than situate the rear brake on the seatstays or the bottom bracket, Specialized has opted to position it behind the seat tube, below the stays, which is likely to have presented significant cable-routing design challenges.

Specialized was not the only manufacturer race testing a new bike in Switzerland. Michael Albasini of Orica-GreenEdge was spotted astride a new Scott Foil — this was in a special paintjob designed to break up and hide the shape until its official launch.



Photo: Andy Jones

Clinton's first 50

Second place at Nationals on first 50 TT outing

The 2008 national hill-climb champion Matt Clinton (Mike Vaughan Cycles) came second behind winner Matt Bottrill in the National 50-mile TT Championships a fortnight ago in Cheshire. Remarkably it was the 30-year-old's first ever 50 miles against the clock. Is a refocusing of targets on the cards, then?

Cycling Weekly: **How did you find your first 50-mile TT?**
Matt Clinton: It was hard, very similar to hilly 40-mile TTs, but because it was three laps the miles ticked away quickly.

CW: **What was the race plan?**
MC: I set out wanting a constant power of 330 watts, knowing if I could sustain that a medal was a possibility, and I was at that until I hit a bit of traffic, and then faded in the last five miles to end with an average of 325 watts.

CW: **How did you train for the race?**
MC: My preparation was the same as any other race; I'm one of the more chilled out guys at the Nationals which probably explains my consistency. For training I was doing 35-mile commutes over 80-90 minutes, jumping in the car and then doing an evening TT. Usually I'd commute for 50 minutes.

CW: **Did a coach advise that plan?**
MC: I've never been coached. I get tips off Bottrill's coach, but I would say 80 per cent of my training is commuting and the rest is made up of weekend rides and club TTs.

CW: **Had the 50 been a long-term aim?**
MC: It's never been on my radar. I've glanced at it to say I might try it but I never considered entering.

CW: **So why enter this time?**
MC: I wasn't going to. I've only been training properly for six weeks because I had shingles. I've never done a 50 before and wasn't sure of my form, but I bit the bullet and signed up on the last day of entries.

CW: **But we can expect to see you back riding 50s, right?**
MC: I was hurting quite a bit afterwards so I won't be doing another 50 until next year's Nationals.

CW: **Despite getting silver in your first ever 50?**
MC: Hilly TTs were my season's targets and because of the shingles I've missed most of them, so they remain my principal aim.

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THE BIG QUESTION

What advice would you give to someone looking to buy their first road bike?

Buy your bike from your local, experienced bike shop that will also help with advice about sizing and position. Don't get hung up on bargain online deals that could leave you riding a bike that's far too big for you.

Kurt M Green

Buy a bike… fall in love with cycling... spend the next 35 years upgrading! Have fun!

Tom Colunga

Buy a good aluminium bike rather than a cheap carbon-fibre one.

Joshua Stewart

Buy the very best you can afford, but make sure you understand that you are getting value for money and what you are buying is suitable for you. Get a professional bike-fit, it should cost the same as a decent pair of road shoes, and will be more comfortable.

Jonny Lowes

It is important to know what type of riding you will be doing, chat with your mates and even borrow one of their bikes — familiarise yourself with all the bikes and gear/equipment available and set yourself a budget for a first bike. Get a decent bike-fit too.

Graham Parsons

Buy as good a frame as you can afford and then if you indeed become an avid cyclist, you can upgrade the gearing, the wheels, the bars, etc. You simply cannot upgrade a frame that is obviously below your riding capabilities, later on.

Richard J Stange

I echo all those that recommend a bike-fit and buying local. It means that if you're a novice like me, or just a first-time road bike buyer, you're not going to ache in the wrong places, you'll be guaranteed to enjoy it from the first ride and you'll be able to easily access on-going advice and support.

Lauren Rothwell



Head to your local bike shop for the best advice

Photo: Simon Dewhurst Photography Ltd

Expect to get conflicting information, expect to be confused and expect to spend a lot more money than you had thought. But learn from all of this. Consider your past enthusiasm in new sporting ventures to make informed decisions as to how far you think you will take cycling. This will help you decide how much to shell out on a bike first time round.

Matthew Guttormsen

The most important rule for any bike purchase: no Shimano on an Italian frame. Ever. No exceptions.

Alan Miles

Learn where all the coffee shops and public toilets are in a 65km radius of your house.

Richard Williams

Don't scrimp on shoes, pedals and saddle. Get the very best you can afford. Get the cleats dialled in, know their position, feel, practise, and use, get a saddle that fits your shape. Your bike will change in the long term, but these three don't necessarily have to, and your body will repay you with increased power, comfort and speed.

Jake Calder Burby

Next week's big question…

What really irritates you in the world of cycling?

Reply to us at cycling@timeinc.com or at www.facebook.com/CyclingWeekly

Letters

Letter of the week wins a Lazer O2 helmet worth £69.99



Anything but flat in Cambs

STAR LETTER

I would like to say a massive congratulations and thank you to everybody involved in organising such an incredible Tour of Cambridgeshire. I enjoyed the event as a competitor, and it was also enjoyed by my family as spectators.

To the organising team, the volunteers working together with the emergency services, local councils and the media coverage, not forgetting the huge amount of vocal support from local residents who created an absolute buzz for those taking part, and even the residents who may have opposed the road closures but did nothing to ruin anybody's day, thank you all so much.

For me, competing in both the Chrono and the Gran Fondo, one of the key factors was the road closures. I had a huge amount of fun while challenging myself mentally and physically. I can't wait for next year's.

I hope that this will be a true 'legacy event' for years to come — what an incredible advert for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Ben M, Peterborough

Cheerful Chilterns

I don't know where Tim Newland lives (*CW*, June 4) but it can't be near me, in the Chilterns. Very few riders don't return a friendly acknowledgment.

This area is very popular for sportives and charity rides. What does irk me and a lot of the locals, though, is the amount of rubbish discarded by some of the participants — empty gel packets and punctured inner tubes. It certainly doesn't portray cycling as having a good, clean sporting image.

Colin Garnham, email

Double (act) thumbs-up

What an amazing week of racing in the Criterium du Dauphiné — made better by the excellent commentary by David Millar and Ned Boulting on ITV4. I thought both did a brilliant job, particularly David, who brought a real insight into the tactics of the teams and individuals as well as an understanding of the reality of racing a stage race. A great commentary double act and a great warm-up for July 4.

Adam Donovan, email

Armchair cyclist

Having been a dedicated cyclist for more than 10 years now, I didn't think there was much that could entice me away from the cherished time I spend in the saddle. In fact I enjoy being active and the great outdoors in general, so I never thought I'd find myself becoming a sofa sloth — yet that's what is happening and it's all the fault of Eurosport and ITV4.

Their fantastic coverage of cycling — most recently with the Women's Tour (get well soon Lizzie!) and the dramatic Critérium du Dauphiné is just too good to miss, and I've found myself forgoing my usual evening rides in favour of cycling highlights programmes lately.

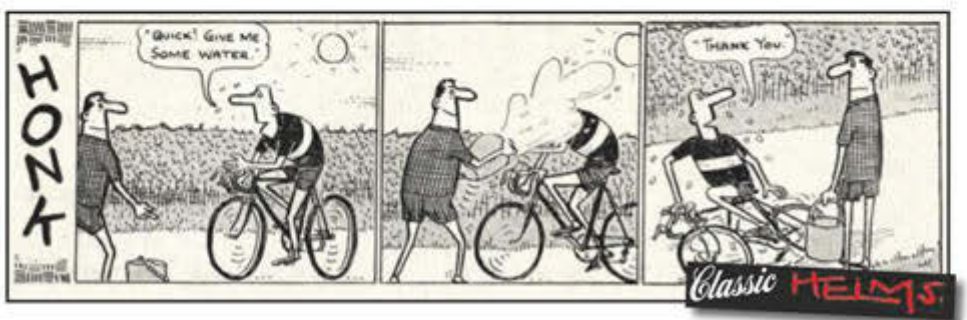
In fairness I'm usually found on the edge of my seat with a heart rate of around 150bpm, so it must surely count as exercise!

Bob 'Knock-On' Wood, email

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Johnny Helms was *Cycling Weekly*'s resident cartoonist from February 1946 until November 2009.

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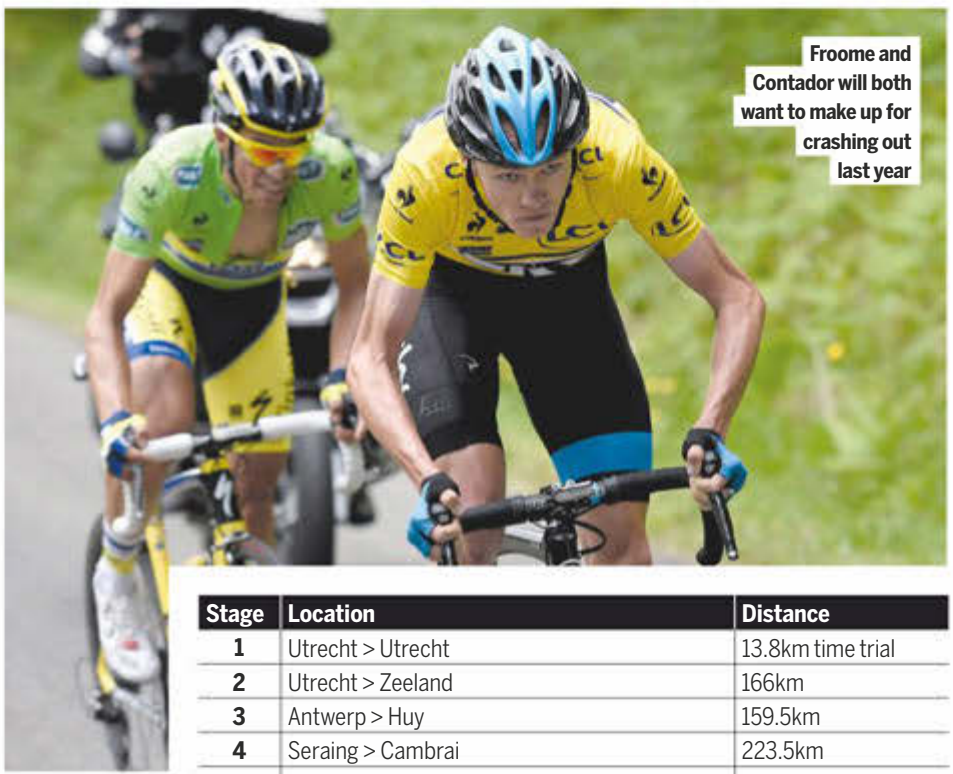
Tour de France 2015



Photo: Jered Gruber

Clash of the Tour titans

This year's Tour de France is predicted to be one of the closest contests in recent years, with the four big contenders all going into the race in their prime



Froome and Contador will both want to make up for crashing out last year

Has there ever been a more talented list of overall contenders at a Tour de France than there is this year?

In Alberto Contador, Chris Froome, Vincenzo Nibali and Nairo Quintana, this year's line-up features a quartet of genuine superstars, each of whom has on separate occasions during the last few years put in a convincing case to be considered the outstanding rider of this generation.

Between them they've already won four Tours de France, 12 Grand Tours (including seven of the last eight), and have amassed 20 Grand Tour podiums in total — all numbers that are likely to continue rapidly accumulating.

Such talent is arguably unprecedented in Tour history. Sure, there's been plenty of big name contests in the past — 1984 saw Laurent Fignon, Bernard Hinault and Greg LeMond go head-to-head, the 1964 podium consisted of Jacques Anquetil, Raymond Poulidor and Federico Bahamontes, and as recently as 2009 Contador, Andy Schleck, Lance Armstrong and Bradley

Stage	Location	Distance
1	Utrecht > Utrecht	13.8km time trial
2	Utrecht > Zeeland	166km
3	Antwerp > Huy	159.5km
4	Seraing > Cambrai	223.5km
5	Arras > Amiens	189.5km
6	Abbeville > Le Havre	191.5km
7	Livarot > Fougères	190.5km
8	Rennes > Mûr-de-Bretagne	181.5km
9	Vannes > Plumelec	28km team time trial
Rest day in Pau		
10	Tarbes > La Pierre-Saint-Martin	167km
11	Pau > Cauterets	188km
12	Lannemezan > Plateau de Beille	195km
13	Muret > Rodez	198.5km
14	Rodez > Mende	178.5km
15	Mende > Valence	183km
16	Bourg-de-Péage > Gap	201km
Rest day in Gap		
17	Digne-les-Bains > Pra Loup	161km
18	Gap > Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne	186.5km
19	Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne > La Toussuire	138km
20	Modane Valfréjus > Alpe d'Huez	110.5km
21	Sèvres > Paris Champs-Elysées	109.5km

Photos: Graham Watson, Chris Auld, Andy Jones


LÉGENDE / THE KEY
Grand Départ
Race Start
Ville départ
Start town
Ville repos
Rest town
C.l.m. individuel
Individual Time-trial
Arrivée finale
Race Finish
Ville arrivée
Finish town
Étape en ligne
Stage
C.l.m. par équipe
Team time-trial
PAYS-BAS
UTRECHT
Grand Départ
samedi
4 juillet
dimanche
5 juillet
ZÉLANDE
ANVERS
BELGIQUE
lundi
6 juillet
mardi
7 juillet
SERAING
HUY
ARRAS
CAMBRAI
ABBEVILLE
AMIENS
mercredi
8 juillet
jeudi
9 juillet
LE HAVRE
LIVAROT
vendredi
10 juillet
PARIS
Champs-Élysées
MÛR
DE BRETAGNE
samedi
11 juillet
FOUGÈRES
RENNES
SÈVRES
dimanche
26 juillet
PLUMELEC
VANNES
dimanche 12 juillet
SAINT-JEAN
DE-MAURIENNE
jeudi 23 juillet
vendredi
24 juillet
LA TOUSSUIRE
MODANE
BOURG-DE-PÉAGE
VALENCE
dimanche
19 juillet
samedi
25 juillet
ALPE-D'HUEZ
lundi
20 juillet
RODEZ
MENDE
Repos
mardi 21 juillet
GAP
PRA-LOUP
vendredi
17 juillet
samedi
18 juillet
DIGNE-LES-BAINS
Repos
lundi
13 juillet
mercredi
22 juillet
PAU
MURET
mardi
14 juillet
TARBES
LANNEMEZAN
LA PIERRE
SAINT-MARTIN
CAUTERETS
mercredi 15 juillet
jeudi
16 juillet
PLATEAU DE BEILLE

Wiggins all did battle. But what sets this year apart is that all four are at the very top of their game.

Contador, Froome and Nibali are all at their peak, aged between 30 and 32, while Quintana has developed rapidly despite only being 25. None of them can be still described as a promising youngster, and none of them is seeing his powers decline with age — they all come to the Tour at their best.

What also sets them apart from many of the past big names is a lack of doping controversies, with just one positive test (Contador's for clenbuterol in 2010) to show between the four of them. We're likely to witness some spectacular rides this month — it's reassuring to know that we can at least tentatively trust what we're seeing.

Then there's each rider's varying racing style, all reflecting specific personalities but united by a desire to attack and to not settle for second place.

Contrasting styles

On one hand there's Contador and his dancing on the pedals, always sniffing out opportunities to attack when on the front foot, and stubbornly clinging to a never-say-die attitude when on the back foot that has seen him pull off results in the most unlikely situations.

Then there's Froome and his train of Sky domestiques, who will look as ever to strangle their opponents in the mountains before unleashing their leader for one of his trademark lethal accelerations.

Nibali is the slippery, crafty one of the quartet, always with a surprise attack in mind on terrain where the others would rather take it easy.

And finally the unflappable, poker-faced Quintana, the lightweight mountain goat who will make everyone hurt on the steepest slopes.

Of course, all this excitement could be swiftly stifled if, like last year, the first week claims multiple casualties. Yet again there is a treacherous cobbled stage for the favourites to negotiate, as well as the usual stress of the hectic early bunch sprints. And it's not just the threat of crashing that will worry the riders — with a short individual time trial and a team time trial bookending a week full of selective obstacles, there's plenty of potential to lose time.

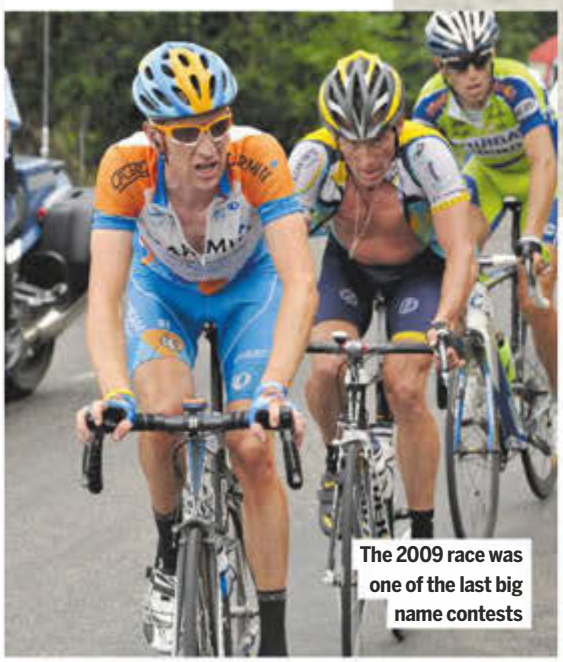
The real battle will get under way in the second week when the race heads into the Pyrenees, with classic climbs like the Col du Tourmalet and Plateau de Beille both tackled. A series of hilly stages across the Massif Central and towards the Alps over the remainder of the second week may not look as spectacular as the Pyrenees, but feature enough awkwardly placed hills to cause further time gaps.

Defining days

It is the four days in the Alps, however, that are likely to define this race. A relentless succession of climbs culminating in huge summit finishes atop La Toussuire on stage 19 and, of course, Alpe d'Huez on stage 20 will provide the arena on which the winner of this Tour will be crowned the day after on the Champs-Elysées.

Fast men

Of course, there's more to the Tour than the yellow jersey battle.



The 2009 race was one of the last big name contests



"All four of the contenders are at the very top of their game"

Mark Cavendish heads into this race hungry to reclaim his status as the world's best sprinter from Marcel Kittel. His German adversary will be difficult to beat if fully fit, and, even if he doesn't recover from his injury problems in time for the Tour, the current glut of sprinting all-rounders (Peter Sagan, Alexander Kristoff, John Degenkolb, Michael Matthews to name just a few) will make life difficult for Cav.

And don't forget the French, who



Each of the contenders has his own distinctive riding style

are still riding the wave of their glorious return to the peloton's elite at last year's Tour. Thibaut Pinot and Romain Bardet may not yet be at the level of the big four, but are young enough to keep improving and perhaps upset the established order.

This Tour may or may not come to down to a historic tussle between the standout quartet — but this is the Tour, and there's excitement to be had on every terrain and on every stage. ■

Our Tour experts

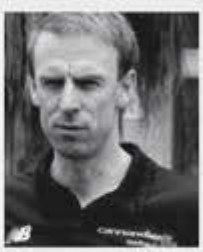


Cédric Vasseur
From: Hazebrouck, France
Tours ridden: 10 (1996-2000, 2002-2003, 2005-2007)
Was an: all-rounder with a sprint who's enjoyed two stage wins.
Will be spending July: reporting from motorbike one with France's TV2.
We say: our French expert who knows what it's like to wear yellow.
He says: "France can expect a lot from what we saw last year with Péraud and Pinot on the podium. It wouldn't be fair to expect a win, it's still too early to match Hinault's '85 win. A podium would be a win for Pinot, who looks the best based on the Tour de Suisse. He's lucky the time trial won't be so important and he's able to play with the four favourites in the big mountains where the race will be decided. Bardet, from what we saw in the Dauphiné, can go well on some days if not in the overall for three weeks."



Malcolm Elliott
From: Sheffield
Tours ridden: 2 (1987, 1988)
Was a: stylish bunch sprinter who won the points jersey at the Vuelta.
Will be spending July: driving and hosting VIPs for Tour organiser ASO.
We say: our go-to authority on bunch gallops and how to top up that Tour tan.
He says: "Who's going to win has been an absorbing topic — it's at least a four way battle. I read one of them [the contenders] say it was actually between about 10 guys, although I think that's deflecting attention.

"Cavendish has been looking good but that stage in the Tour of Switzerland was a bit disconcerting. When you're a sprinter, one bad result can shake your confidence a lot. He's shown a lot better than Kittel so far — but you never know, Kittel could come in fresh. We've seen people come back from worse conditions."



Charly Wegelius
From: born in York but now lives in Finland
Tours Ridden: 3 (2007, 2009, 2010)
Was a: hardworking domestique riding in the service of Ivan Basso and Cadel Evans.
Will be spending July: calling the shots from the Cannondale-Garmin team car. He's been a sports director with the team since 2012.
We say: the regular *CW* columnist offers deep insight as to what's going on in a race.
He says: "Contador and Froome are the obvious favourites but it's hard making a predication how Contador will go because he's raced so much. I think we'll know who's going to win overall by the time we've done the Pyrenees. The Alps will just be confirmation.

"I think there's quite a lot of potential for a relatively unknown rider to make the podium. The big mystery for me is Quintana. We've not seen much of him but his team has paid a great deal of attention to get him ready. They put him in some of the early-season cobbled races and recced the Tour sectors, but we've not seen much of him lately."



Mark Cavendish: all about the Tour

His win tally for the first quarter of the season is bigger than he's ever achieved before, so it's no wonder Mark Cavendish is feeling full of confidence ahead of the Tour de France

Nick Bull

Mark Cavendish is chatty when *CW* meets him in central London in late May. Surprisingly so, in fact, given how tired he looks as he sits down.

The Etixx-Quick Step sprinter had arrived back from America the previous day — a flight that ended a four-week period in which his participation at the Tours of Turkey and California was split by just one evening with his family at his Essex home. His time away from the UK proved incredibly beneficial, and not just because of the seven wins he amassed in the two stage races.

The challenging terrain of both events will have helped his preparations for his fast-approaching return to the Tour de France, and a post-California visit to this year's World Championships course in Richmond, Virginia, got him dreaming of another rainbow jersey.

"I'm looking forward to it," Cavendish says of September's Worlds. "If I didn't think it was possible [to be in contention at the finish], I would have already said I'm not interested."

It's bold talk, since the Manxman's name has barely been touted as a potential winner. Cavendish admits that "Classics riders" are well suited to the city centre circuit which features three very short cobbled climbs.

Then again, he had won more times by mid-May this year — 13 — than in any of his previous eight seasons as a professional. On such form, it's little wonder that Cavendish's trademark confidence is out in force.

"Circumstances have meant I haven't been sick or ill," he explains. "I've been super-happy in terms of form; it's the same form I have at this time every year. I don't have to train any harder now to get to that level than I used to."

When talking about wins, it's usually quantity that is focused on, so I ask if he feels 2015 has been his *best* season to date. He pauses for a couple of seconds.

"In 2009 I won San Remo and four stages of the Giro [including a team time trial]," his voice trails off.

His critics will agree with his answer, and most likely point out that it's nearly a year since he last won a WorldTour race — stage four of the Tour de Suisse. Ten of his victories thus far in 2015 have been in *hors catégorie* events, the second-most-prestigious in terms of the UCI's rankings. Is the lack of a 'big win' somewhat ironic given that he famously accused André Greipel of deliberately targeting smaller events in 2010?

"The categories don't mean anything anymore," he replies, before listing March's Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne as his favourite win of the year to date.

Perhaps unfortunately for him, it got overshadowed by Ian Stannard's brilliantly executed win at Het Nieuwsblad the day before, and came after Etixx DS Wilfried Peeters reportedly claimed Cavendish wouldn't make it to the finish in the front group.

"Although it's only a 1.1 category, it's a hard race. In fact, it's probably harder than some WorldTour races," he adds. "The way the team rode, and that it wasn't just a flat race that ended in a bunch sprint was pretty nice."

If his season wasn't so Tour-focused, a potential Giro d'Italia start could have led to his first WorldTour victory of 2015, particularly given the relatively modest array of sprinters in the race. "I love that race, I miss it," says Cavendish. With fewer sprint stages than mountaintop finishes in 2015, the Giro is hardly conducive to his aspirations for July. "It's been really hard this year," he adds.

Team unity

Neither of Cavendish's last two Tour de France stages ended well. The first was on the Champs-Elysées in 2013, in which he lost his unbeaten record on the famed Parisian boulevard; the other was in Harrogate last July.

"I don't think I've got unfinished business in the Tour de France," he emphatically states. "I want to be successful in the Tour, regardless of what has happened in the past."

Such is the strength in depth possessed by Etixx that it more than adequately coped in his absence last July. Matteo Trentin won in Nancy, while Tony Martin time trialled to win solo into Mulhouse and then took the race's sole stage against the clock in Périgueux.

The team ended last year's race one short of its 2013 haul, and this year's route looks well suited to the Belgian squad. Cavendish says: "The team has won the most races this year, and that's been across time trials, one-day races and stage races. We've been successful with more than a dozen different riders.

"We'll be limited to what we can do on GC, but I think we've got the best set of riders across the 21 stages. Look at the first nine days of the race — a prologue, Mur de Huy, crosswinds, cobbles, small narrow roads, I think we're the

Mark Cavendish's best wins of 2015

Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne, March 1
Cavendish didn't just get over the numerous hills along the race's route: at one point, he was part of a 20-rider group who split from the peloton on the Oude Kwaremont. The race came back together, but Cavendish edged out in-form Alexander Kristoff in the sprint.

Tour of Turkey, stage seven, May 2
The Manxman was distanced on a first-category climb 30km from the finish, yet managed to rejoin the peloton after a frantic chase. Rival teams weren't keen to lead out Cavendish, thus slowing a reduced peloton down inside the final kilometre, but this allowed team-mate Mark Renshaw to work his way through some gaps and give him a lead-out, from which he won comfortably.

Tour of California, stage five, May 14
A messy final kilometre left Cavendish with just a "cooked" Renshaw to lead him out. Belgian Zico Waeytens (Giant-Alpecin) boldly struck out 400m from the line — admittedly, it was into a headwind finish — and would have secured victory had it not been for Cavendish's quick response.



Photos: Graham Watson, Yuzuru Sunada, Offside *L'Equipe*



For Cav, last year's Tour began and ended on stage one

team best equipped to deal with that."

It's hard to imagine anything — other than a misfortune similar to the one he suffered in Harrogate — preventing Cavendish from being victorious at the Tour again, particularly given how Marcel Kittel has fared in 2015 to date.

The 30-year-old Manxman's domestiques haven't been as good or as well drilled since his all-conquering 2011 season with HTC-Highroad, but the arrival of former Cannondale rider Italian Fabio Sabatini has helped.

"I think that this year's Etixx team is the strongest collective group since I've been with the team," Cavendish adds. "It's reminiscent of HTC.

"Fabio knows what he needs to do, absolutely. We train together in Italy, as he lives not far from my house and he's become a close friend of mine.

"He's nice to have around the dinner table at races, and he's great away from them, too."

Provoking another HTC comparison, the team achieved a memorable lead-out on the final stage of the Dubai Tour. Cavendish's speed, with team-mate Mark Renshaw, saw them pull out a sizeable gap over the peloton in the final 500m.

Furthermore, Etixx have consistently taken responsibility to pull the peloton during any potential sprint stages. After all, as their DS Brian Holm pointed out without slight at the Tour of California, "We all know he [Cavendish] is fast, but he can't win without a bunch sprint."

This can have its drawbacks. "It's a bit frustrating if you don't catch the break,

"This year's Etixx team is the strongest it's been since I've been with them. It's reminiscent of HTC"

or if at the end of a stage other teams come to the front to help and the TV cameras pick that up," Cavendish says. "Sometimes, when the break has got a gap we won't pull back, other teams will put three riders on the front to go full gas. I just don't get that.

"If I owned a team — actually, even if I was a sponsor — and the team didn't go out to race, but to make another team lose, I'd be pretty p***ed off."

I interrupt to ask whether these tactics can be interpreted as a mark of respect. "Yeah, it's nice in that sense," says Cavendish. "We may moan about it, but the next day we'll be back riding again."

Stage win target

Pre-race talk ahead of the last two Tour starts, in Corsica and Yorkshire, centred on Cavendish's chances of claiming the first yellow jersey of his career.

Even with the reintroduction of time bonuses (10, six and four seconds to the first three riders on each stage for "the first year since I turned pro") the nature of the race's opening week makes gaining yellow a tough ask this time around.

When the subject of the maillot jaune comes up, the Manxman sounds almost like a DS: "If we can limit the time losses in the prologue, there's the opportunity to get the yellow jersey in the first week as well." Note the use of 'we', not 'I'.

Also new for 2015 is an amended points system, aimed at making Peter Sagan's quest for a fourth consecutive green jersey harder. Last year, it was his consistency (11 times he placed between second and 10th, but didn't win a stage) that gave him a comfortable victory.

Scoring is now more heavily weighted towards flat stages, offering 50, 30 and 20 points, a notable and welcome shift for Cavendish, who has stressed the green jersey is more a by-product of his target than his outright aim.

"It's the same as always — the way to get it is to win stages," he said. "For the type of rider I am, there's no other tactic to try to win green with."

Cavendish's current deal with Etixx runs out at the end of the season, and at the time of our interview negotiations did not appear to be in an advanced stage.

Earlier in the year, team manager Patrick Lefevere publicly suggested that no matter how many times Cavendish wins this year, his Tour performance will determine the finer parts (read: money and length) of the deal.

"It's still too early to say anything," says Cavendish, hinting that negotiations have at least started. "The team's really gelling together, we've got great equipment now on the bike and I'm pleased where I am."

His mention of equipment isn't just PR-speak: a mechanical problem with his FSA chainring triggered a high-speed crash during a Tirreno-Adriatico sprint finish and, after swapping to a blacked-out SRAM equivalent, he was denied the chance of a second Milan-San Remo victory because of a similar issue. He has since swapped to a Shimano Dura-Ace chainring, which he last used in 2012.

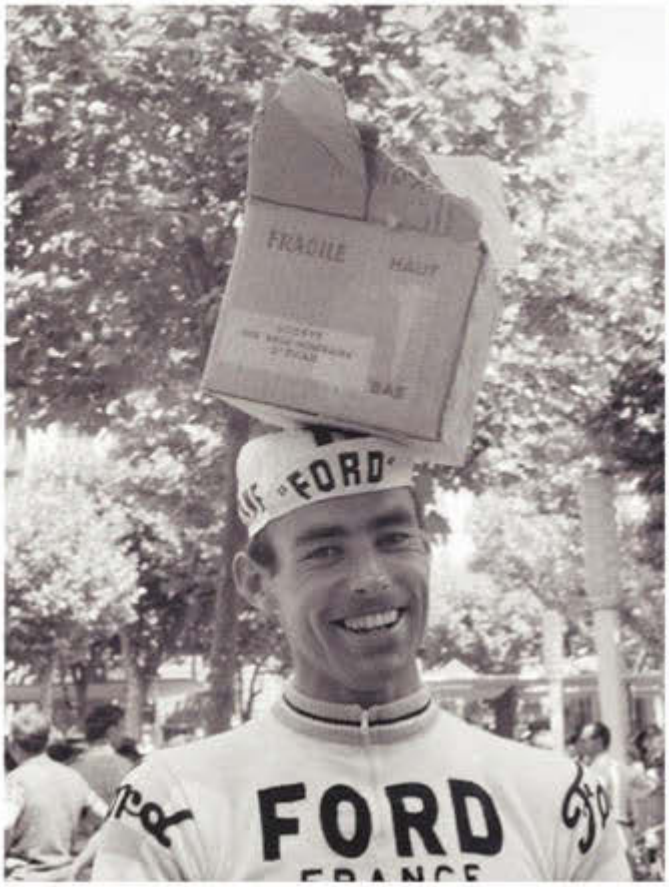
What if the Tour doesn't go to plan again? I point out that the Revolution series meeting in the Derby Velodrome in August would offer him a chance to score the points required to keep him in contention for a ride in the omnium at next year's Rio Olympics.

"I don't think about it," he replies. For now, everything is geared to the Tour.

"It's like going away with a group of friends. You look forward to it. It's about enjoying yourself — it's like camping."



Happy with Etixx: "I'm pleased where I am"





Brits at the 1965 Tour

Newly discovered negatives from our archive reveal an intimate portrait from 50 years ago



Simon Scarsbrook

Half a century has passed since the 1965 Tour wound its anti-clockwise route around France, via Belgium, after a start in the then West German city of Cologne.

Copies of *Cycling* at the time contain concise reports but little photography of the race. The chance discovery of a cardboard box marked 'Staff negs and contacts' has provided a gold mine of previously unseen material.

Hot off the scanner (quite literally, as the process is ongoing), we present here a small selection of the 1965 British race contingent — Vin Denson, Michael Wright and Tom Simpson. Details are sketchy as to some of the circumstances, and there is a bit of guesswork based on the file numbering when it comes to captions. But what perhaps becomes more apparent are the characteristics of the three Britons and their reactions to their changing fortunes along the way.

Further images from this remarkable set of previously unseen photographs appear in the August edition of *Cycle Sport Magazine*, available from July 1.



Opposite, clockwise from top: the three Brits, Vin Denson, Michael Wright and Tom Simpson

Below: Stage 1b, team time trial in Liège. Denson's Ford-France team took the win with Simpson's Peugeot-BP team three seconds adrift in second

Above: After the finish, Simpson and another team member appear to be in dispute with an official, perhaps questioning the result?







Above: Stage four featured a track finish at Saint Brieuc. Simpson took the bunch sprint for sixth place ahead of world champion Jan Janssen. Edgard Sorgeloos of Rik Van Looy's Solo-Superia team took the win, some 33 seconds up the road

Left: Simpson soon after the stage and at this point in the race, 24th overall on the GC

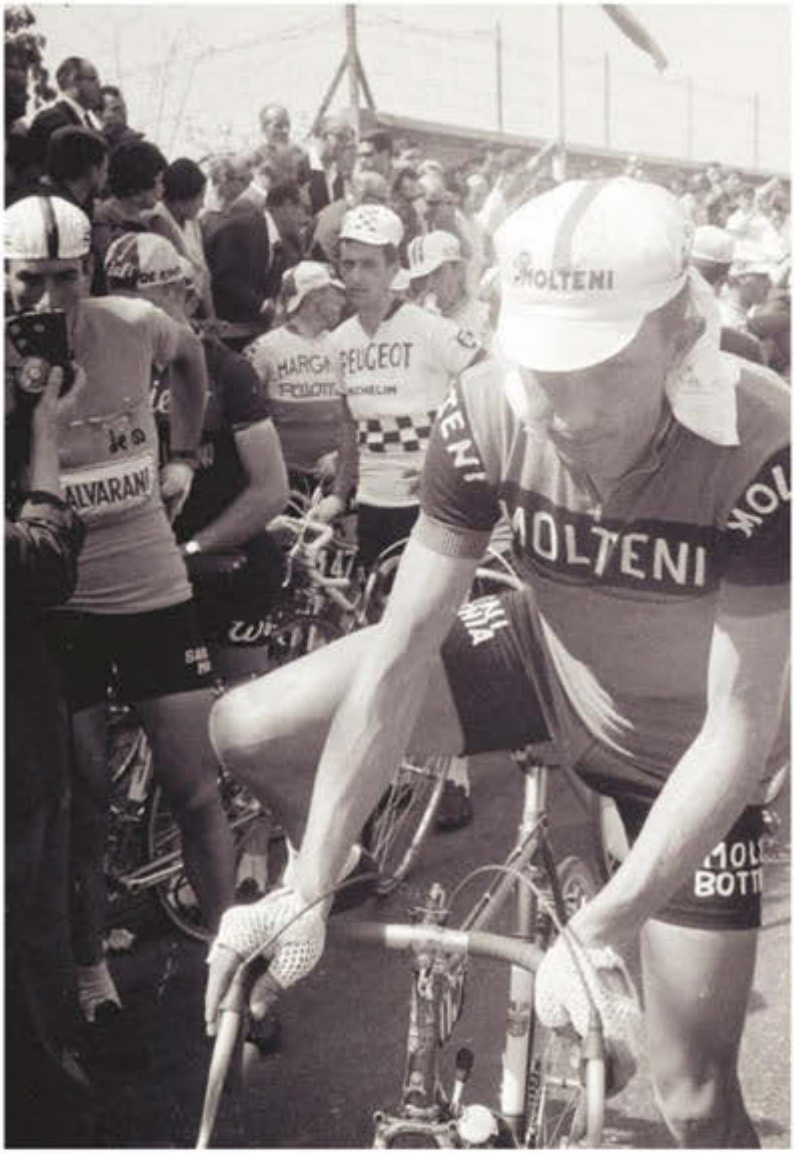




Left: Simpson and Wright chat before the 240km stage from Roubaix to Rouen. Wright went on to finish runner-up to Felice Gimondi, who unexpectedly took the maillot jaune

Below: We believe this to be the finishing circuit of stage 5a to Châteaulin in Brittany. Denson looks to be well positioned near the front with one lap remaining

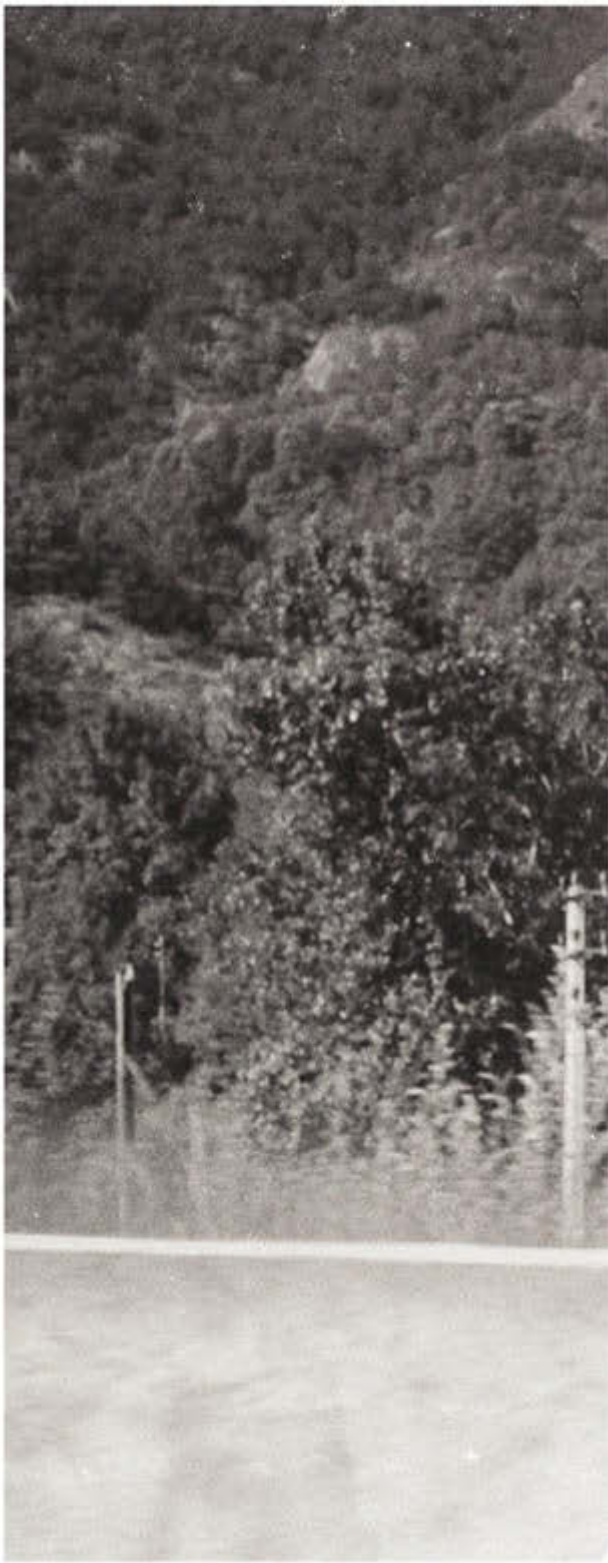




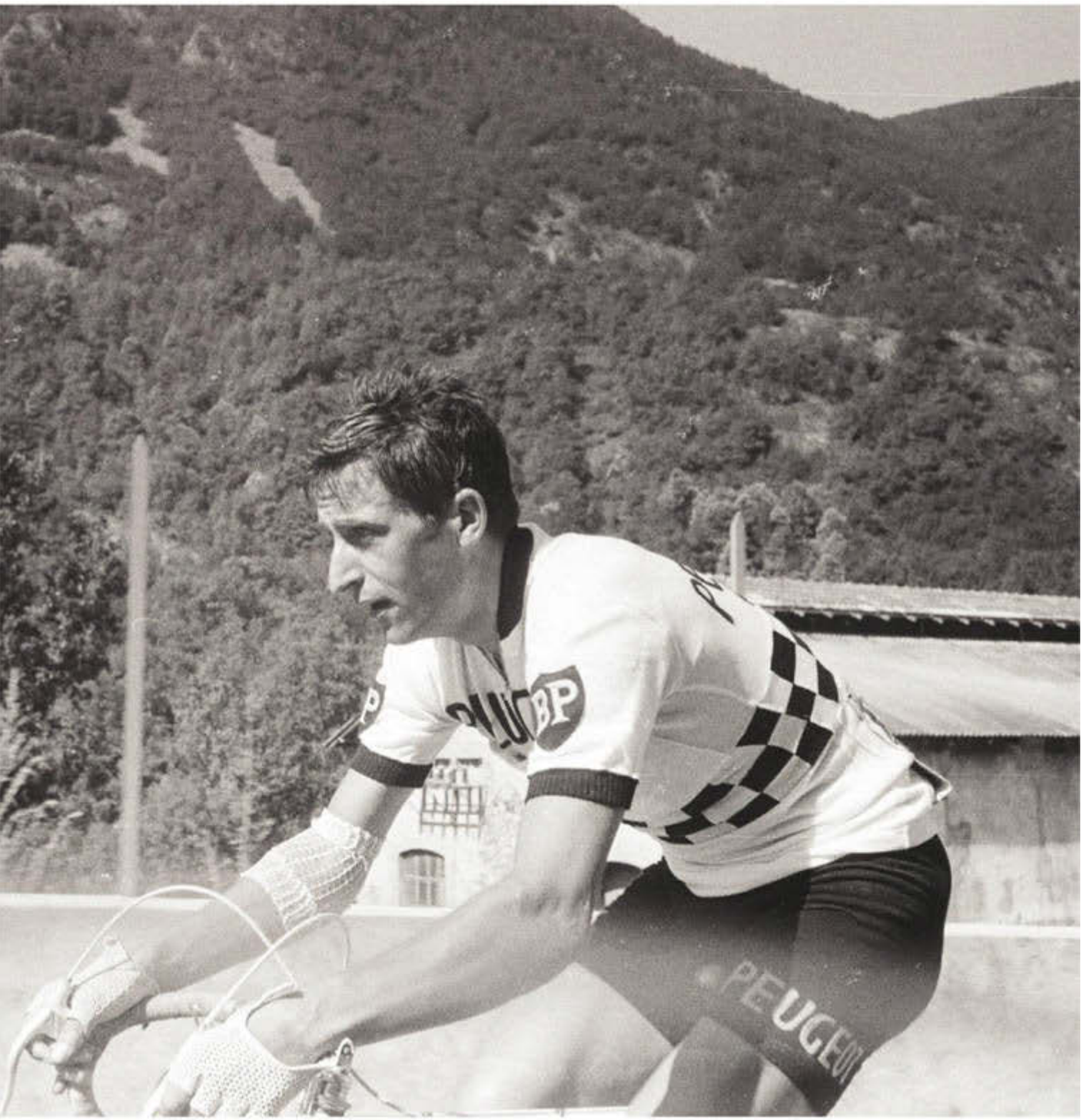
Left: Simpson looks on while the press clamour for the attention of a yellow jersey-wearing Gimondi (left of picture) before the stage start in Barcelona

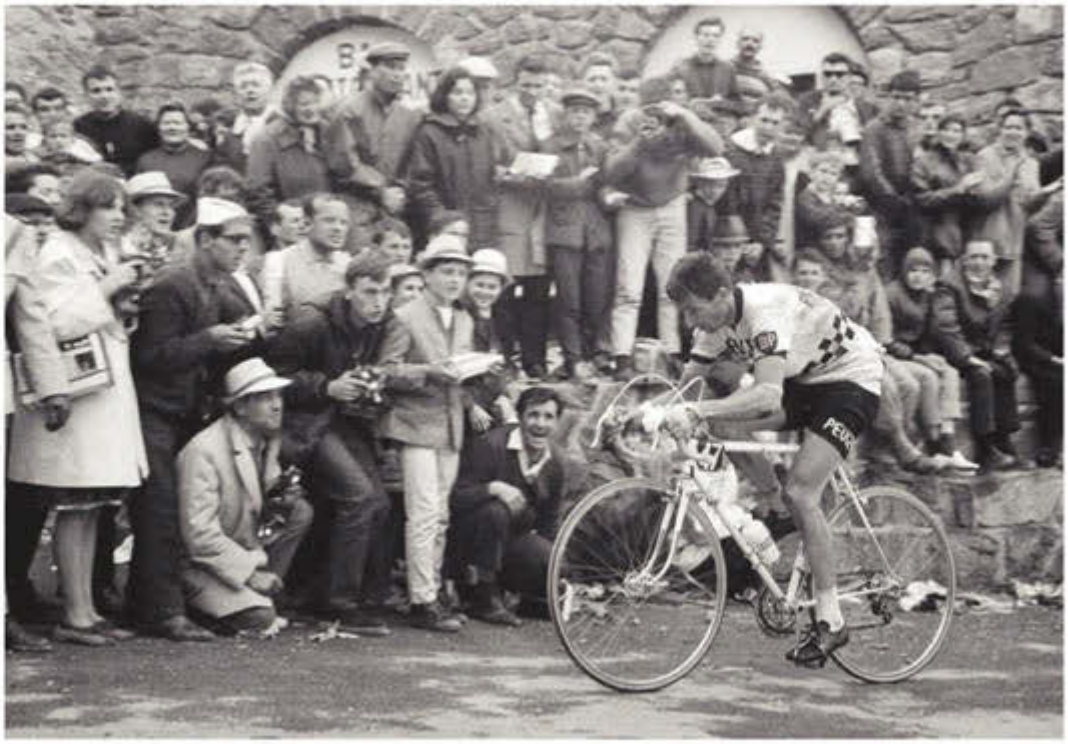


Below left: Race director Jacques Goddet, in his trademark pith helmet, assembles the field in a hot and dusty Barcelona ahead of the stage to Perpignan



Below: Simpson's emotions really come across in many of the photographs. The journalists of the time appeared to have the freedom to move around the race in their own cars, and a few of the photos, as here, feature the car window at the bottom of the shot — which obviously didn't lower the whole way!





Right: Simpson had a tough time in the Pyrenees, crashing heavily when, according to the report, a car overtook on the descent of the Tourmalet. His shredded jersey seen here at the Tourmalet summit suggests it may have been earlier, or maybe a separate crash. Despite this he took 10th on the stage and moved up to seventh overall on the GC

Below: Happier times as the three Britons pose for *Cycling*'s photographer







Left: The amateur Tour de l'Avenir was run on the same route as the Tour, finishing here in Barcelona. We think this is the Great Britain squad that included Peter Chisman who won stage four to Roubaix

Above: Eventual Tour de France winner Gimondi crests an Alpine pass, followed closely by fans' and bookies' favourite, Raymond Poulidor.



Left: Simpson chats before a stage start, somewhere between the Pyrenees and the Alps. Musettes and caps lie on the floor nearby; a far cry from the tinted coach windows of today's major stage races

Below: With a huge snow bank in the background, this appears to be the beginning of the Tourmalet descent. Here we can see a spare tubular around Denson's shoulders, indicating that the field — and team cars — were spread out on what sounded, by all accounts, a mammoth stage





Left: Wright climbs Mont Ventoux, a stage won by Poulidor. The reporter for *Cycling* commented that Wright was one of the fastest riders in the Tour, but had precious little help from his team



Left: Wright proved his speed on stage 20 to Auxerre. The longest stage at 298.5km, Wright made a break with Frenchman Michael Grain and finished two seconds ahead of him and the closing bunch



Above: Simpson pays a visit to the race doctor. His wounds had become infected and he had also, according to reports, contracted a heavy cold





Above: Denson at a stage start, late in the race. Throughout the Tour he just seemed very happy to be there, always ready with a smile and a joke

Left: Simpson may have lacked Denson's jovial nature but his resolve and steely determination were beyond dispute



Left: Stunning scenery as the race finally leaves the mountains and heads into the verdant valleys

Below left: Denson receives a daily prize from a sponsor

Below: Simpson was advised to quit the Tour with just a couple of stages remaining. When contacted after the race, it was discovered that the doctors were in two minds whether to amputate his hand. Simpson said: "I had one abscess cut out during the Tour... it was not so much the pain in my hand that stopped me as the poison which was eating into my system, and which I later found out in Paris was really dangerous."
A month later he won the World Road Race Championships





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Tour rules and regulations

Any three-week long race that features a number of different competitions will need a whole load of complex rules and regulations to ensure fairness. Here are some of the most important laws of the Tour

Daniel Ostanek

The rules and regulations for cycling's biggest race, the Tour de France, are lengthy and can sometimes be confusing. We all know the general rules of cycling, but already this season we have seen a number of lesser-known regulations come to the fore.

The Spring Classics in particular highlighted a number of rules, including the one requiring riders to stick to the road, rather than avoid the cobbles and ride on the pavement or verge; or that riders must stop at closed level crossings, as was the case at Paris-Roubaix.

However, while these have been enforced, other sections of the rulebook are often ignored. Take, for example, the rule stating that rain jackets should be either clear or in the team colours, rather than the black massed ranks of the peloton we often see when the heavens open. Another oft-ignored rule that the UCI has started to crack down on is the ban against mechanics hanging out of moving cars to carry out repairs. At Paris-Nice, multiple teams were fined for doing just that, rather than stopping on the roadside to help.

So what gems are in the Tour de France rulebook? We've scoured our copy to filter out the white noise and bring you the important stuff.

Photo: Graham Watson.



Key rules

Technical assistance

Article 4 of the rulebook relates to an issue that we all heard about at the Giro d'Italia, when Team Sky's Richie Porte was given a two-minute time penalty for accepting the help, and the front wheel, of Orica-GreenEdge's Simon Clarke.

Helping riders on another team by giving them food, drink or accessories (known as 'small services' in the rulebook) is allowed. So too is assistance from rival team cars if a rider has fallen behind.

What isn't permitted is giving wheels or bikes to riders on rival teams. With most team leaders surrounded by domestiques ready to help them out in case of a mechanical, and lesser riders in the team able to donate their equipment and wait for the team car if the situation does occur, it's a situation that's unlikely to happen often.

But as we saw in Italy last month, in the heat of the moment and with a race slipping away, riders will take any help that is on offer, as Porte did. Hopefully this incident will be in mind come July.

Feeding and the feed zone

According to Article 6, there are two ways for riders to take on food and drink during a race. The first, and most obvious, is at the feed zone. Usually located in the middle of the stage, these locations see team staff stand on the right-hand side of the road, holding out bottles and musettes full of food. There are waste collection zones at the beginning and end of the feed zone, and there's also a special motorcycle assigned to collect waste.

The second method is for riders to drop back to the team car and pick up what they need. Domestiques stuffing multiple bottles into their jerseys to ferry up to team-mates is a common sight during a race, while Tinkoff-Saxo even pioneered a special vest at last year's Tour to carry multiple bottles. Breakaway riders are also permitted to take drinks from the race organiser's motorcycles, should a team car not be present.

Continuous supply of these refreshments is authorised for most of the stage, starting at the 50-kilometre mark and ending with 20km to go. Riders can take refreshments from the team car at any point, and grab something from team soigneurs, who can be placed throughout the stage, sometimes at the summit of climbs.

Under exceptional circumstances or extreme weather conditions, race directors may change these provisions.

Slipstreaming or hanging on to vehicles

It's something we see in every race on the calendar, but it's still technically against the rules. Yes, it's the age-old practice of riders following in the slipstream of team and commissaires' cars, often when they are trying to regain contact with the peloton after a crash or a mechanical.

The stern-titled Article 7 of the rulebook — 'Race offences' — forbids this, with race stewards able to exclude any rider that breaks it. Also on the hit list, and something which is outlawed by the UCI, is riders holding on to cars. This includes the infamous 'sticky bottle' as well as the on-the-move fixes we often see mechanics perform.

Fines and time or points penalties are the most frequent punishments for these offences, with only particularly egregious examples resulting in a rider being disqualified from the race.

Level crossings

Ah, the dreaded level crossing. Paris-Roubaix most notably has seen a number of incidents featuring riders keen to keep on racing rather than stop and wait for a train to pass.

In the 2006 race, three of the top five finishers were retrospectively disqualified after riding through a level crossing. And at this year's race the issue came up again, as half of the



Riders prepare to collect supplies from the feed zone

peloton streamed across a level crossing just seconds before a TGV locomotive thundered past. However, there were no disqualifications due to the number of riders involved.

Article 19 of the Tour rules state that there are a number of options the race stewards can take, should a closed level crossing disrupt the race. If a breakaway group with a gap of over 30 seconds is caught as a result of stopping at a crossing, then the race will be halted and restarted with the same time gaps as before. In other situations the closure of the level crossing is considered a race incident, e.g. if one or more riders cross before the crossing closes, and the pursuers are held up behind it.

This is not an issue that comes up too often during the Tour, and a level crossing last appeared on stage 16 of the 2013 edition, when the peloton patiently waited for a train to pass.

The 3km rule

In basic terms the rule, outlined in article 20, states that any rider who crashes or suffers a puncture or other mechanical incident in the final three kilometres of a stage is credited with the same time as the group he was with at the time of said incident.

The 3km rule is unique in that it was devised on the fly at the 1937 edition of Paris-Nice. When race leader Roger Lapébie crashed towards the end of one of the final stages, the organisers took pity and decided to stop the clock.

The rule wasn't formally applied until 1972, when it was known as the 1km rule. In 2005 it was extended to the final three kilometres.

In 2015, the rule won't be applied on stages one, three, eight, nine, 10, 12, 17, 19 and 20, as they are either time trial stages or summit finishes.

Time bonuses

For the first time since 2008, time bonuses will make an appearance at the Tour this year. Each of the first nine stages (with the exception of the time trials) will see bonuses of 10, six and four seconds handed out to the first three riders across the finish line.

The compromise means that the crucial mountain stages won't be artificially altered by the bonuses, the complaint that saw them disappear after 2007. Tour organisers hope that the reintroduction of the bonuses will spice up the race for the yellow jersey in the opening week, traditionally a battleground for the sprinters.

Tour in numbers: points and prizes

A new points system means that pure sprinters who win stages have a greater chance of taking the green jersey, as opposed to those who finish consistently at the top of the standings, like Peter Sagan has been doing in recent years.

Stages two, five, six, seven, 15 and 21 are all classified as flat stages, with 50, 30 and 20 points on offer for the top three finishers, and a sliding scale down to two points for the man in 15th. Meanwhile, stages three, four, eight, 13, 14 and 16 are classified as hilly stages, with 25, 22 and 19 points up for grabs, again down to two points for 15th.

Previously, podium places on flat stages offered 45, 35 and 30 points, while hilly stages offered 30, 25 and 22. It's a decisive shift towards a focus on stage wins — particularly on the flat — and means we'll see a different battle for the green jersey.

As for the King of the Mountains competition, that points system stays the same, with double points awarded on the summit finishes on stages 10, 12, 17, 19 and 20. Hors catégorie climbs award 25, 20 and 16 for the first three riders over the top, while the lowly fourth category climbs offer just a single point.

"Prizes for jersey winners are more modest than you might expect"

A total of €2,030,150 is up for grabs during the race, with €450,000 of that going to the overall winner. The men who finish second and third in Paris get €200,000 and €100,000 respectively. Every finisher gets a prize, with riders finishing below 90th taking home €400.

Stage winners will take home €8,000,





Nutrition can only be handed out in designated feed zones



On-the-fly repairs will be heavily penalised

while the victorious team in the TTT wins €10,000. There's also prize money for wearing each jersey every day, as well as winning intermediate sprints and leading over mountain passes. The Souvenir Jacques Goddet is a prize for leading over the Col du Tourmalet, while the Souvenir Henri Desgrange is given to the man who leads over the race's highest peak, this time the Col du Galibier. Each rider will get €5,000.

Prizes for jersey winners are more modest than you might expect. The green and polka dot jersey winners each get €25,000, while the best young rider and the most combative rider win €20,000. The best team earns €50,000 to share out amongst themselves.

The time cut

The time cut is a limit for each stage that riders must finish within, and is a carefully calculated percentage of the stage winner's time and the average speed of the race. It is enforced to ensure that riders don't take it easy on certain stages to conserve energy for other days.

The time cut comes most into play during the stages in the high mountains, and the group that is most concerned by it is the autobus or gruppetto. Generally made up of the weakest climbers in the race, this motley crew of sprinters, domestiques, ill and injured, join together to survive through the soaring peaks of the Alps and Pyrenees, mentally calculating the time cut to ensure they finish within it.

One stage in particular stands out as a troubling prospect for the autobus. It's the penultimate stage of the race — stage 20 from Modane to the fabled mountain of Alpe d'Huez.

At just 110.5km it's one of the shortest road stages of the race. This is to encourage hard racing from the general classification men, who have a last chance to influence things before Paris. The stage also features the small matter of the Col du Télégraphe and Col du Galibier, fearsome climbs that come after just 13km. Factor in tired legs after 19 days of racing and it's going to be a battle to stay in the race for some.

However, the rules are not always as black and white as finish outside the time cut and you are eliminated. For example, stage 20 of this year's race is almost a carbon copy of stage 19 in 2011, won by Europcar's Pierre Rolland. The Frenchman finished the stage with a time of 3:13.25, with an average speed of 33.96kph. The pace and difficulty of the route meant that 83 riders finished just outside the time limit, around 25 minutes down on Rolland, which was almost half the riders in the entire race. As the gruppetto was so large, organisers did not exclude them.

Should something similar happen this year, then expect the outcome to be the same, though smaller groups will probably find themselves less fortunate — while the gruppetto survived the time cut on stage 19 in 2011, Belgian Björn Leukemans, who finished solo even further back, was eliminated. If said riders have fallen victim to bad luck or crashes then expect a show of mercy from the organisers.

Onto the numbers then, and the Tour sure has a lot of them pertaining to the time cut. The stages are divided into six categories depending on their toughness, e.g. 'very difficult', 'medium difficulty', with each category given a particular set of time cut calculations as percentages of the winner's time based on his average speed.

Time trials have a flat rule of the winner's time plus 30 per cent, while flat stages, which present fewer obstacles, have calculations ranging from an additional three per cent if the winner's time is under 36kph to 11 per cent if the winner averages over 50kph.

Stage 20 of this year's race to Alpe d'Huez falls under the fifth time cut category, that of a "very difficult short stage". As such, calculations range from 11 per cent (30kph and under) to 22 per cent (40kph and over) increasing in 1kph increments. Based on what happened in 2011 an average speed of 33-35kph seems likely, so here's a quick-and-easy guide to the scenarios should that be the case.

An average speed of 33 to 34kph means that the time cut will be an additional 15 per cent of the winner's time. At 34kph the winner's time would be 3:14.59, meaning the time cut-off is 3:44.14.

Whatever happens, we'll send our best wishes to the autobus on what looks like being the toughest day of the race to survive. ■

How to calculate the time cut

Speed	Winner's time	%	Additional time	Time cut-off
Under 30kph	3:41.00	11%	24min 19sec	4:05.19
30 to 31kph	3:33.52	12%	25min 40sec	3:59.32
31 to 32kph	3:27.11	13%	26min 56sec	3:53.07
32 to 33kph	3:20.54	14%	28min 8sec	3:49.02
33 to 34kph	3:14.59	15%	29min 15sec	3:44.14
34 to 35kph	3:09.25	16%	30min 18sec	3:39.43
35 to 36kph	3:04.10	17%	31min 19sec	3:34.29
36 to 37kph	2:59.10	18%	32min 15sec	3:31.35
37 to 38kph	2:54.28	19%	33min 9sec	3:27.37
38 to 39kph	2:49.59	20%	34min	3:22.59
40kph and over	2:45.45	22%	36min 28sec	3:22.13

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STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Chris Froome

Team Sky

Chris Froome had kept a comparatively low profile in the lead-up to the Tour de France this season, until his Critérium du Dauphiné victory last week reaffirmed his Grand Tour ambitions.

Rivals have noted Froome's less auspicious build-up in terms of his results this season compared to those in the run to his 2013 yellow jersey victory. The 30-year-old had three wins to his name, four if you include the points classification at the Ruta del Sol, prior to the Dauphiné, in contrast to eight in 2013, and he has raced less.

Nevertheless, Froome is the major favourite for the Tour and will have a devoted Team Sky, who have been on song, at his disposal.

The Kenyan-born Brit has been unequivocally focused on the Tour since the off-season where he trained for a period with chief pilot Richie Porte in Australia.

As long ago as December, Froome was set on working his way back to his magic 67kg race weight for a Tour in which he said Tinkoff's Alberto Contador poses the biggest threat of all.

"I'm quite finicky about the small details and getting everything absolutely right in preparation for a race," Froome said. "I'm stubborn that way, as an athlete. If I set my mind to something I'll make sure I do it no matter what it takes."

Key support

Sky have enjoyed a renaissance across the board this season after a lacklustre 2014.

There's no doubting the fitness of Sky's riders but their appearance has raised a few eyebrows. In April *L'Equipe* labelled its climbers as "anorexic", which Froome's considerably leaner Porte rebuked in his run to a failed Giro bid. Sky have also appointed a new nutritionist, whom riders have praised.

Whether the leading Grand Tour team adopts its latest 'marginal gain' — a motorhome for its title contender — remains to be seen.

FACT FILE

Age: 30
Height: 1.86m
Weight: 69kg
WorldTour ranking: 16
Wins in 2015: 5
Career wins: 26
Days racing in 2015: 27
Best Tour GC finish: 1st
KM raced in 2015: 4,225
Form rating: ★★★★

Photo: Graham Watson



Vincenzo Nibali

Astana

Last year's Tour victory was a surprise to those who saw Vincenzo Nibali as consistent but unspectacular. One of just six riders to have won all three Grand Tours (after adding the Giro in 2013 to his 2010 Vuelta triumph) there should be little doubting the Italian's class. He has gone under the radar again this season, with his best result a forgettable 10th at the Tour of Romandy, behind Chris Froome, Thibaut Pinot, Nairo Quintana and Romain Bardet.

At Tirreno-Adriatico he was 16th overall, again failing to mount a challenge to his Tour rivals. It was, however, a similar story in the build-up to last year's Tour when he went on to spend just two days without the yellow jersey on his shoulders. He seized control of the race before Froome hit the deck on stage five and Alberto Contador on stage 10. The 30-year-old Italian, who is strong on the descent as well as the climb — a legacy, perhaps, of the BMX and mountain biking days of his youth — has been relatively lightly raced this season, with just 35 days in the saddle compared to the 45 he had put together before the 2014 Tour. Last year his build-up was meticulous yet unspectacular — will it work again this year?

Key support

It looked touch-and-go for a while, but Astana will be taking the start line in Utrecht. And duly reprieved by the UCI, Alexandre Vinokourov will undoubtedly put out a strong supporting cast for his lead rider. Michele Scarponi, part of a rich vein of Italian blood that runs through the squad, has been around for years and has a Giro win under his belt, while GC stalwart Jakob Fuglsang is in fine form. Add in Lars Boom, Lieuwe Westra and Tour veteran Andriy Grivko, and this is a fearsome unit.

FACT FILE

Age: 30
Height: 1.81m
Weight: 65kg
WorldTour ranking: 105
Wins in 2015: 0
Career wins: 30
Days racing in 2015: 35
Best Tour GC finish: Winner (2014)
Km raced in 2015: 5,641
Form rating: ★★

Photos: Graham Watson, Yuzuru Sunada

Alberto Contador

Tinkoff-Saxo

From one angle, two-time Tour champion Alberto Contador's season is coming to the boil at the perfect time. After a quiet start to 2015, he brushed off an early crash at the Giro d'Italia to throttle the life out of the race in its final week, and his single-minded drive up the Mortirolo on stage 16 was something to behold. His main Tour challengers, though, were elsewhere. While he left a Quintana in his wake in Italy, it was Dayer rather than older brother Nairo; and it was the latter who took the honours at Tirreno-Adriatico in March, when the Spaniard could only manage fifth. Chris Froome beat him at the Ruta del Sol, and Richie Porte and Alejandro Valverde saw him off in Catalonia.

Reason enough to worry? Maybe not. Contador remains a formidable rider when he hits the front — briefly losing the lead to Fabio Aru after being caught behind a crash on stage 13 of the Giro was the first time he had ever had to surrender a Grand Tour leader's jersey. But his rivals will have noticed the little wobble in the race's penultimate stage that cost him a couple of minutes. If he is going to pick up his first Tour win for six years, he will need to be rock-solid.

Key support

Now the UCI has dropped its biological passport case against Roman Kreuziger, it looks like Tinkoff-Saxo's big guns — Kreuziger, Michael Rogers and Ivan Basso — will come together for this Tour. All three were with Contador at the Giro and emerged unscathed, and they look to have put good mileage in their legs this season without being overworked. The trio can boast eight top-10 GC finishes between them at the Tour, as well as around 40 years of experience, and Rogers and Basso in particular will offer the wise old heads that every Tour winner requires.

FACT FILE

Age: 32
Height: 1.76m
Weight: 62kg
WorldTour ranking: 2
Wins in 2015: 4
Career wins: 61
Days racing in 2015: 44
Best Tour GC finish: Winner (2007, 2009)
Km raced in 2015: 7,291
Form rating: ★★★★



STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES



Nairo Quintana

Movistar

The sight of Nairo Quintana riding away from his rivals on Monte Terminillo in driving snow at Tirenno-Adriatico dispelled any doubts over the Colombian's physical or mental toughness. The stage win sealed the overall impressively, ahead of a shell-shocked Alberto Contador.

A consummate climber, Quintana returns to the Tour this year having been sent to the Giro in 2014 — which he duly won. He may have taken the Tour by storm in 2013, but his Movistar team made the dreadful decision to back Alejandro Valverde at the race in 2014.

Quintana returned to the Classics this year, as he had before finishing second in the Tour in 2013. His experience at Flèche Wallonne in particular should help him on this year's third stage, which will finish on the Mur de Huy. Alongside a solid fourth at the Tour of the Basque Country, he has taken on the Dwars door Vlaanderen and E3 Harelbeke, leaving no cobble unturned in building up his experience on the *pavé* in for readiness this July.

The Colombian will join Contador at the four-day Route du Sud, but those are his only scheduled racing days between May 3 and the start of the Tour. Having been back in Colombia training at altitude, he will take the start line at Utrecht with his form largely unknown — but do not write him off.

Key support

Last year's main man Valverde tops the bill for what is a climbing-heavy parcours, and is coming in on good form after wins at Flèche Wallonne and Liège-Bastogne-Liège. But can the Spaniard be relied on to see his more talented Colombian team-mate through the mountains?

Spaniard José Herrada was perhaps the key lieutenant in Quintana's Giro victory last year — before putting in a gutsy effort in support of Valverde at the Vuelta. And Herrada will have gained confidence from taking his first victory for five years at the Klasika Primavera in April, however low-key the event.

FACT FILE

Age: 25
Height: 1.67m
Weight: 59kg
WorldTour ranking: 15
Wins in 2015: 2
Career wins: 21
Days racing in 2015: 36
Best Tour GC finish: Second (2013)
KM raced in 2015: 5,254
Form rating: ★★★

Photo: Grham Watson

RECOVERY FROM SERIOUS CYCLE INJURY

If you (like me) have ever been unfortunate enough to suffer a serious injury following an accident then I suspect pretty high-up your list of priorities was getting fit enough to get back on your bike. The more determined you are to get better, the more engaged you will be with your rehabilitation. In my 25 years of professional experience dealing with serious cycle injuries it is this positive attitude that counts and contributes to a favourable recovery. Efforts made in the early stages, in terms of rehabilitation, reap massive rewards later on. Whatever you do, seek advice from appropriate medical practitioners. After my accident I was treated by a very nice young physiotherapist who was very caring and spent a lot of time with me.

It later turned out (after speaking to some senior NHS and private sports physio's) that he was a cardio physio, and much of his advice was inappropriate! I'm not knocking the NHS who were amazing, but for physiotherapy for the commonly occurring cycle injuries (such as my shoulder and clavicle fractures) I recommend you use a private sports physio if you know one, or, ask your solicitor to put you in touch with one if not, if your solicitor does not know of one then they are not specialists in cycle claims!

Generally, priority number two is getting the bike fixed or replaced - no easy task for those of us riding expensive, custom-built bikes and not wanting to take a chance that the carbon fibre has been forever compromised! The best advice is to have your own cycle insurance from a specialist provider (there are cycle insurance comparison sites on the web).

If you are not insured and are making a claim on a driver's insurance, ensure your solicitor has the expertise and back-up of Cytech qualified engineers to do a damage report so the bike can be replaced or repaired through specialist contacts, we have hundreds of shops throughout the country that can provide this service. If you are concerned about getting back on the bike again, face those demons head-on and remember the benefits of cycling outweigh the risks, I have clients in their eighties who are testament to this! Be positive, focused and take good medical, legal and engineering advice, and, like me, those bad days will be behind you quicker than Cav's last 50 metres on the final sprint!

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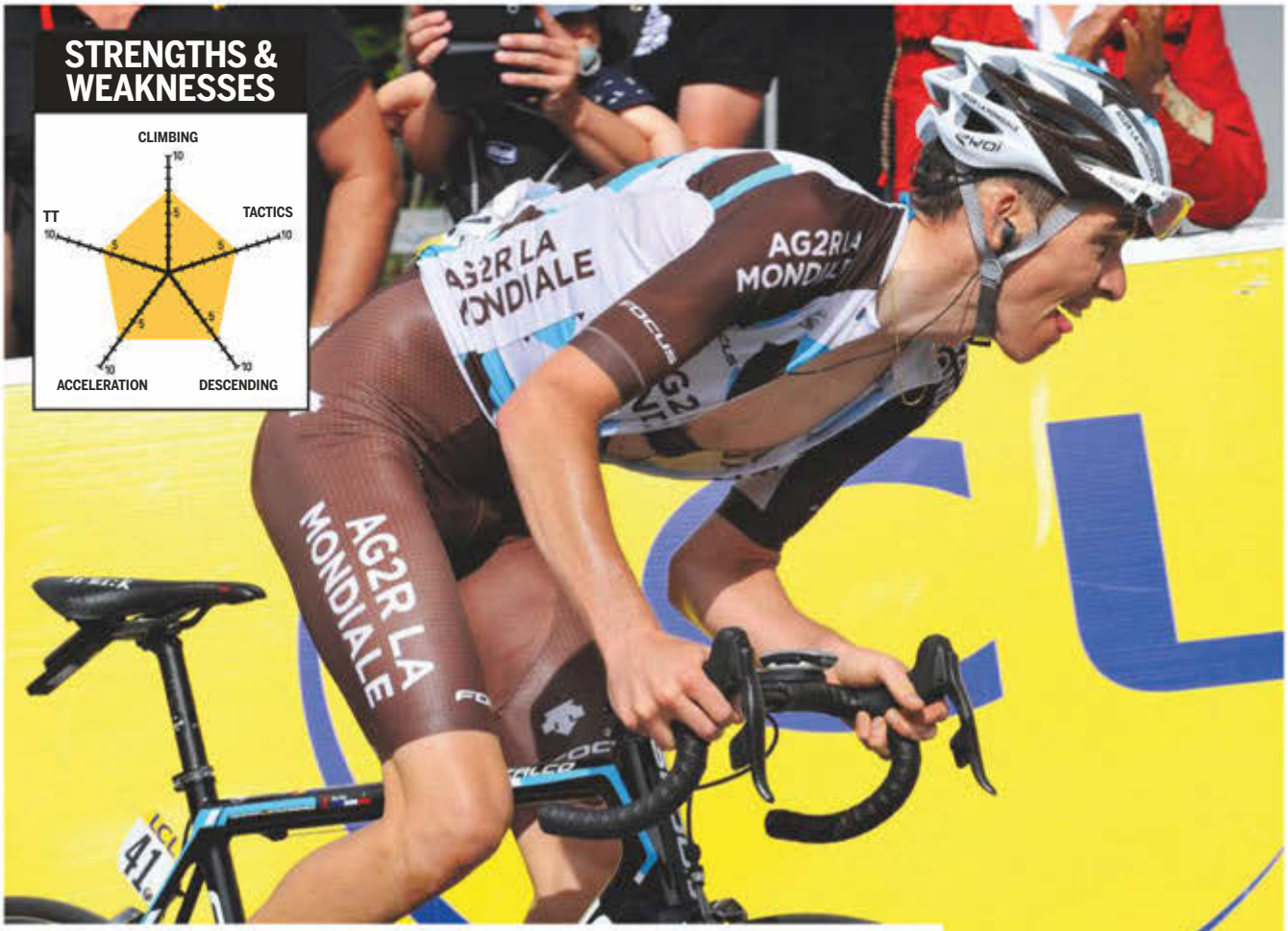
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Romain Bardet

Ag2r La Mondiale

The man who has spent the last few years juggling his burgeoning cycling career with studying for a diploma at the Grenoble School of Management had not, until recently, claimed a single WorldTour win.

Ag2r, however, saw enough in 2014's stirring sixth place at the Tour (and a string of other strong results last season — fourth in the Tour of Catalunya, fifth in the Critérium du Dauphiné, 10th at Liège-Bastogne-Liège) to sign up the 24-year-old until 2018.

At this year's Dauphiné, he showed why he was worth that investment, with an expertly controlled descent off the treacherous Col d'Allos to take victory on stage five. Even more significant is the fact that the win took place at Pra Loup, on a stage that is virtually a carbon copy of what faces the riders on stage 17 of this year's Tour.

Having pulled away on the taxing descent, Bardet single-handedly held off a Team Sky-driven peloton on the 6.2km climb. Even concerted efforts from Chris Froome and Tejay van Garderen — which proved too much for Vincenzo Nibali — couldn't bring Bardet back. He is yet to prove his time trialling credentials, but could be a significant threat.

Key support

The longest-standing French squad remaining in the peloton, Ag2r picked up the team honours at last year's Tour. Blel Kadri's solo triumph on stage eight — as GC contenders lined up for the minor places two minutes down the road behind him — was the highlight. There may be some awkward discussions to be had this time round if ex-mountain biker Jean-Christophe Péraud continues his late-career blossoming. His progress took him to second last year, but he will surely fall into line if Bardet is in contention.

FACT FILE

Age: 24
Height: 1.84m
Weight: 65kg
WorldTour ranking: 30
Wins in 2015: 1
Career wins: 3
Days racing in 2015: 43
Best Tour GC finish: Sixth (2014)
KM raced in 2015: 6,553
Form rating: ★★★

Photos: Corvos, Graham Watson

Thibaut Pinot

FDJ

Thibaut Pinot has stayed out of the limelight for much of this year. What we have seen, though, has been promising. The young Frenchman has put in good showings at Tirreno-Adriatico (where he finished fourth, ahead of Alberto Contador and Vincenzo Nibali), the Tour of the Basque Country (10th), and the Tour of Romandy, where an excellent win on the penultimate stage saw him claim fourth place overall, and the Tour de Suisse.

His Tour performances so far are promising too, finishing 10th on his debut in 2012 followed by a spot on the podium last year. Pinot's first shot at La Grand Boucle showcased some serious talent when he stayed with Chris Froome as the Sky rider moved away from Bradley Wiggins on La Toussuire. Pinot then outsprinted Froome to take second place on the stage.

It may still be too early to tout Pinot as a likely winner — he is yet to really prove himself in a time trial, and question marks remain over his descending ability. His country has been crying out for its first winner since the glory days of Bernard Hinault and Laurent Fignon. It may have to wait a bit longer for Pinot, but the 25-year-old is not too far off.

Key support

FDJ continues to develop homegrown talent. Aside from Pinot, Arnaud Démare knows his way around a sprint, Jérémy Roy is an able captain, and Arthur Vichot stood up well at Paris-Nice. But it is a foreigner who may be of most interest to Pinot this year: the experienced Swiss Steve Morabito. The 32-year-old was an able lieutenant to Cadel Evans during their five shared years at BMC, and will be expected to provide Pinot with similar support.

FACT FILE

Age: 25
Height: 1.80m
Weight: 63kg
WorldTour ranking: 13
Wins in 2015: 2
Career wins: 11
Days racing in 2015: 44
Best Tour GC finish: Third (2014)
KM raced in 2015: 6,062
Form rating: ★★★★



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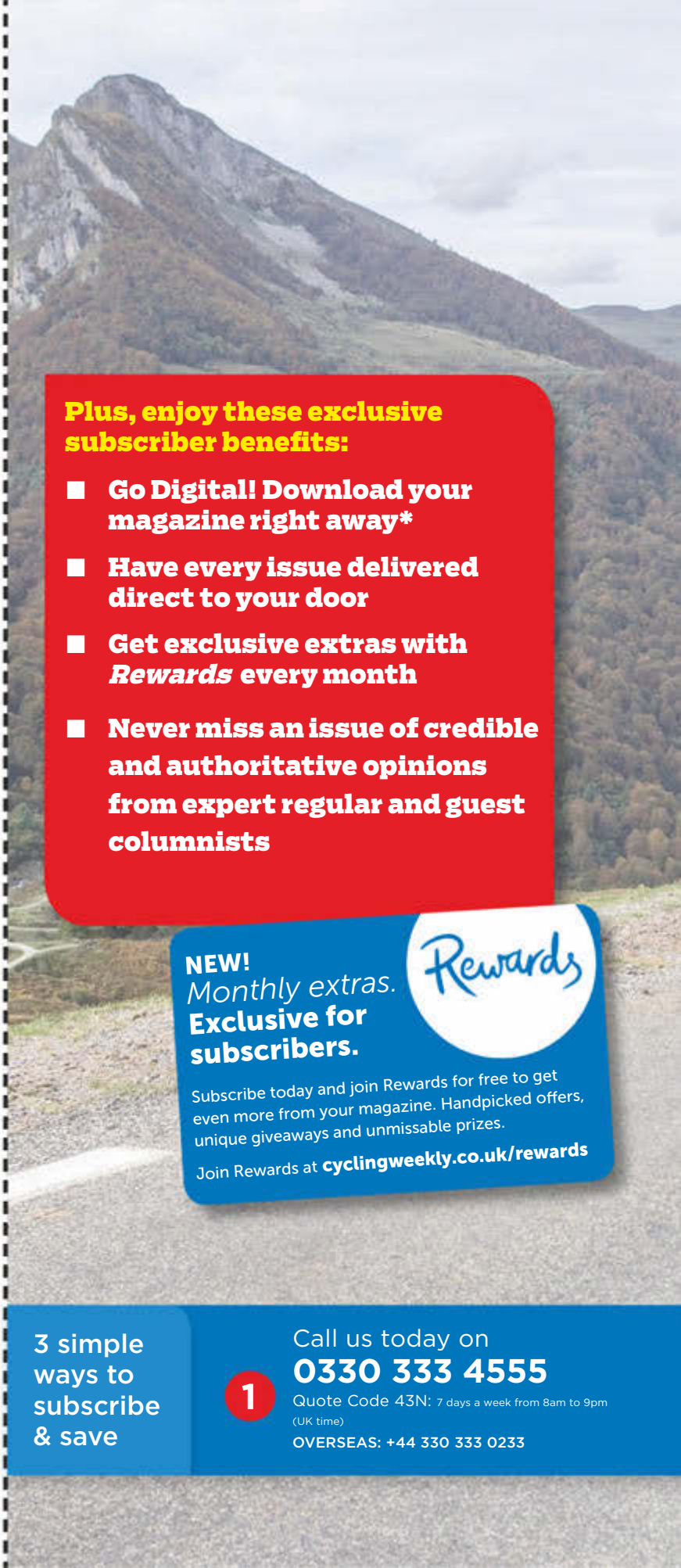
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Mark Cavendish

Etixx-Quick Step

Mark Cavendish will go to the Tour de France with a point to prove this season. The 30-year-old is a legend of the race as his 25 career stages — and the green jersey at the 2011 edition — attests.

However, Marcel Kittel has since 2013 superseded the 'Manx Missile' as the man to beat, and Cavendish is determined to show he is not bound for retirement yet.

Cavendish is out of contract with Etixx-Quick Step after this season and his performance at the Tour, and ability to re-establish No.1 status, may impact on contract value, thus providing further motivation. Added to that incentive is his early exit from the race last year following a high-speed crash on day one in Harrogate.

The mercurial fastman has been consistent this season despite suffering a stomach virus after a trip to South Africa with his good friend and former lead-out man, Mark Renshaw, in March.

Performances at the Dubai Tour, which he won overall, Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne and a collective seven-stage haul at the Tour of Turkey and Tour of California in May are among his 13 victories this year. But in contrast to rivals, Cavendish hasn't won at a WorldTour race so far this season, which may also niggle at the man who once famously said of André Greipel: "If I wanted to get s**t small wins, I'd race s**t small races".

Key support

Renshaw has served as both a pilot to Cavendish and a road captain this season, the victories a testament to his dual contribution. The pair have worked together famously at the Tour before.

"It always make a difference with Renshaw," said sports director Brian Holm. "It makes a difference in the last 500 metres and also in the way the team organises."

FACT FILE

Age: 30
Height: 175cm
Weight: 70kg
WT ranking: NA
Wins in 2015: 13
Career wins: 133
Days racing in 2015: 39
Tour stage wins: 25
KM raced in 2014: 7,243
Form rating: ★★★★

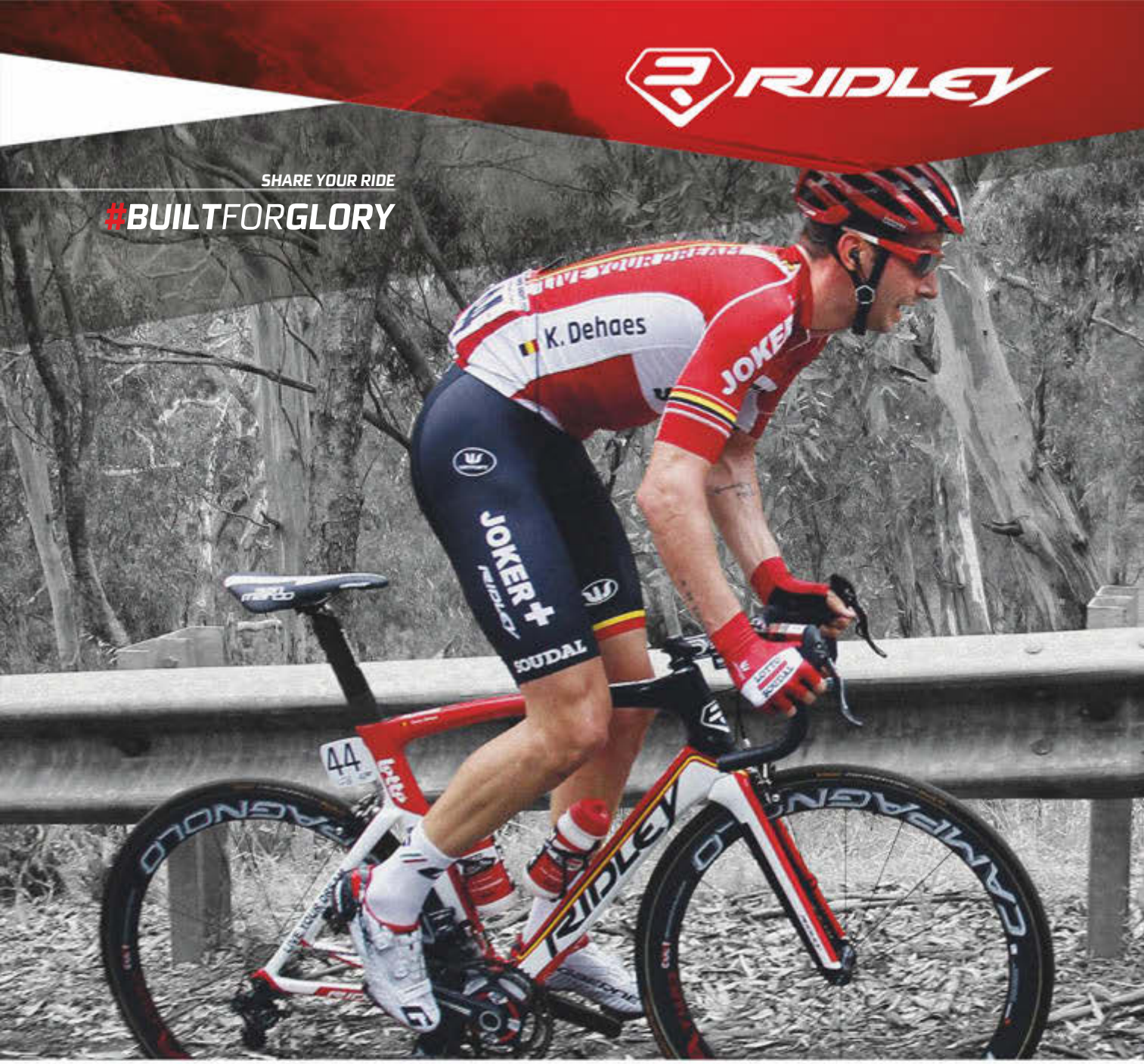


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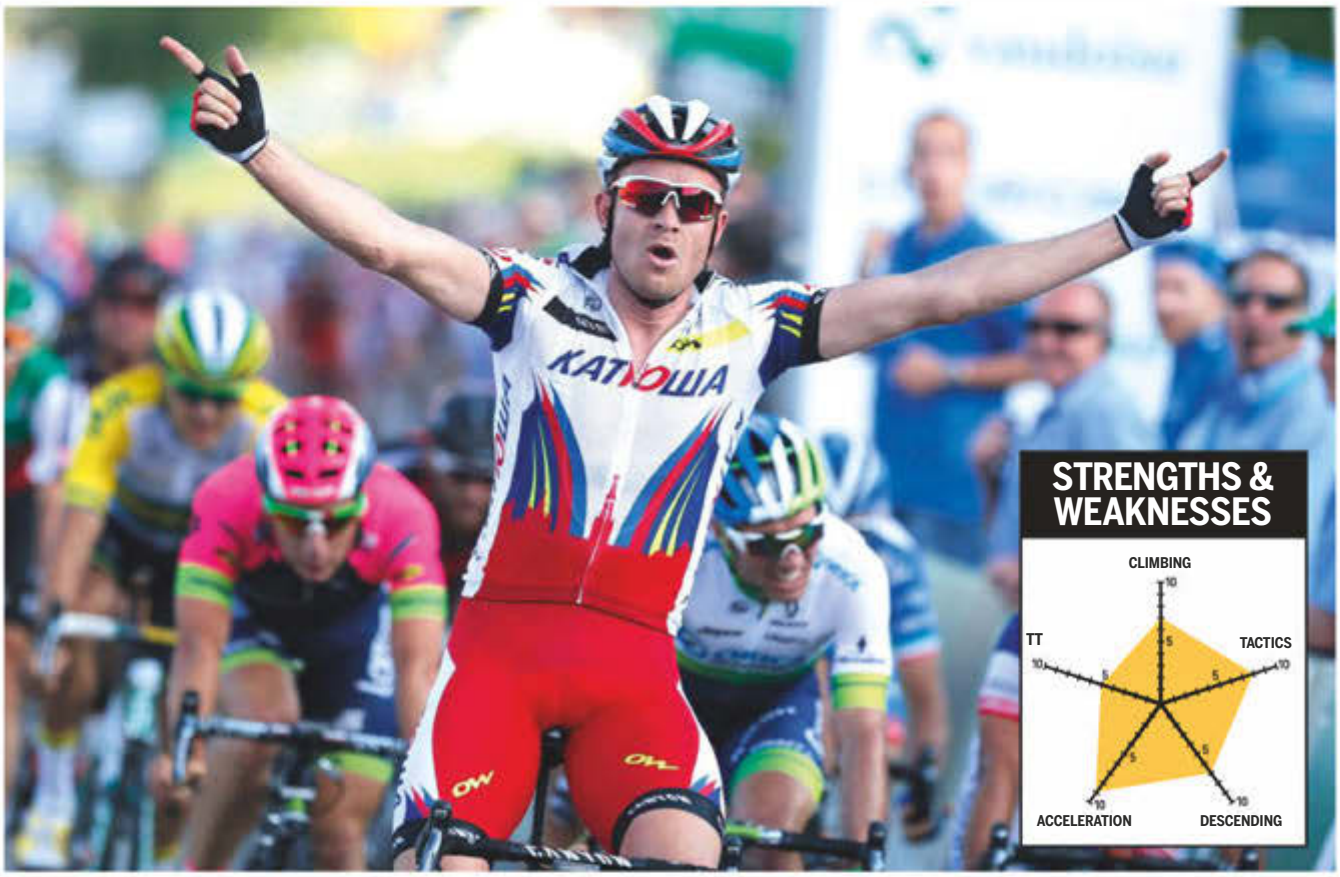
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Alexander Kristoff

Katusha



Alexander Kristoff has been the stand-out sprinter of a season in which he has so far amassed an impressive 16 victories.

The versatile fastman may not be able to beat Marcel Kittel or Mark Cavendish in a 200m drag-race but his ability to climb should deliver at least one stage win at the Tour.

Kristoff had a breakthrough at the race last year, winning two stages and finishing second in the points classification behind Peter Sagan, in what was only his second race participation.

"I have learned I have this strong attack; I don't always need to sit on the wheels," he observed earlier this year.

The 27-year-old has continued that success in 2015. He was celebrated at the Spring Classics after winning the Tour of Flanders as well as Scheldeprijs, the latter in the absence of his major rivals, and consistently claimed stage victories before and after, including one at Paris-Nice.

Kristoff has worked well with his organised and now trusted Katusha sprint train. He and veteran Luca Paolini, who won Ghent-Wevelgem in March, have also formed a dynamic partnership.

Kristoff extended his contract with Katusha in spring — a confidence vote from the team.

The 2012 Olympic road race bronze medallist has experience withstanding the expectations of being a protected rider, which he will need to call on during his next major objective in France.

Key support

Rival Etixx-Quick Step sports director Brian Holm has questioned how much support Katusha will provide Kristoff in July.

Holm recently speculated that the squad may invest more in 36-year-old Joaquim Rodríguez and his overall goal at the race, which could hinder Kristoff's green jersey ambitions. No team in recent times has achieved the jersey double.

Katusha general manager Viatcheslav Ekimov said his outfit would have two groups to support each rider. "Balancing that can be challenging but I think it's logical, at least in our team. The support group for each rider can help both our leaders," Ekimov has said.

FACT FILE

Age: 27
Height: 183cm
Weight: 78kg
WT ranking: 8
Wins in 2015: 18
Career wins: 42
Days racing in 2015: 51
Tour stage wins: 2
KM raced in 2015: 8,403
Form rating: ★★★★★

Photos: Graham Watson



STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Peter Sagan

Tinkoff-Saxo

Some riders might be given a year's grace when they move to a new team, but not triple maillot vert champion Peter Sagan. Sagan signed with Tinkoff-Saxo for a reported €4 million and with that came an expectation of results, firstly at the Spring Classics, where the Slovak prodigy was only there or thereabouts.

Outspoken team owner Oleg Tinkov wasn't impressed, not seeming to take into consideration that riders can sometimes take a season to properly gel in a different squad.

Sagan apparently got the message in time for the Tour of California in May, which, following two stage victories, he won on a time bonus.

The 25-year-old has been unbeatable in the green jersey competition at the Tour that he has won three times consecutively but cannot be described as a shoo-in this season.

Sagan can work on his own and may need to as part of a team determined to win the yellow jersey with Alberto Contador.

The reintroduction of time bonuses in the opening nine days (excluding time trial events), which are predominately flat, may also shake up the green jersey competition. Giant-Alpecin sports director Marc Reef has said his team won't vie for it while Marcel Kittel and John Degenkolb are on the same squad but there will be perhaps more opposition for Sagan than in previous years.

Key Support

Sagan's strength is his versatility and consistency; he may not win but he is guaranteed to be around the mark. Given that, there is little reason to suggest that he and Contador cannot coexist in the Tour squad and meet their respective goals. British sports director Sean Yates joined Tinkoff-Saxo this season and will, along with Steve de Jongh, help steer the team there. Yates has experience managing such lofty ambitions, which can only help. At his last Tour in 2012 the British mastermind guided Bradley Wiggins to victory while negotiating with runner-up Chris Froome and star sprinter Mark Cavendish, who was previously accustomed to a fully dedicated Tour squad.

FACT FILE

Country: Slovakia
Team: Tinkoff-Saxo
Age: 25
Height: 1.84m
Weight: 73kg
WorldTour ranking: 20
Wins in 2015: 6
Career wins: 71
Days racing in 2015: 43
Tour stage wins: 4
Km raced in 2015: 6,675
Form rating: ★★★

Photo: Graham Watson

Michal Kwiatkowski

Etixx-Quick-Step



World champion Michal Kwiatkowski is a proven one-day racer as the rainbow bands show, but the extent of his full talent is yet to be seen.

Kwiatkowski finished 11th at the Tour de France on his debut in 2013 and while the yellow jersey is not a consideration for him this season, the diverse rider has shown he has the potential to go for it in the future.

The 2014 Polish national time trial champion is set to, along with Tony Martin, be afforded his own opportunities at the Tour in a team that may otherwise prioritise Mark Cavendish.

That shouldn't be a problem for Kwiatkowski, who demonstrated his ability as a tactician at the Worlds last year, where he exhausted national team-mates early in the race before making a strong move within the final 10km.

Kwiatkowski had a triumphant Ardennes Classics campaign where he took line honours at the Amstel Gold Race, but has so far recorded fewer victories than last season. He has made minor placings, finishing second to Geraint Thomas and Richie Porte at the Volta ao Algarve and Paris-Nice respectively, and was top 10 at the Tour of the Basque Country in April.

Kwiatkowski has apparently observed a lighter programme in the lead-up to the Tour. He returned to racing at the Tour de Suisse in June, his first race back since the Ardennes.

Key support

Kwiatkowski and Martin proved they can be a formidable duo when they put their TT skills to use; see this year's Paris-Nice, so given free rein they could go on the attack. Etixx DS Brian Holm once said, "Kwiatkowski is a complete rider. He looks like a climber, he can sprint, he can ride on the cobbles," so he will surely have confidence in him to go for a stage win. Kwiatkowski favours hilly parcours, meaning stage three, ending on the Mur de Huy — the final climb of Flèche Wallonne — and stage eight to Mûr de Bretagne, will be in his sights.

FACT FILE

Age: 25
Height: 176cm
Weight: 68kg
WT ranking: 14
Wins in 2015: 2
Career wins: 14
Days racing in 2015: 31
Best Tour GC finish: 11th
KM raced in 2014: 6,185
Form rating: ★★★

Photo: Graham Watson



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Race guide

21 stages, 198 riders, 3,360 kilometres, 13.3km of cobbles, 24 mountains, but only one winner. The Tour de France is where it all happens and it brings bike racing to the world in a way that no other race can. Drama, scenery, joy and despair all concentrated into the most exciting three weeks of the year. **Here is everything you need to know**



Photo: Yuzuru Sunada

TIME TRIAL

Stage 1 Utrecht > Utrecht

13.8km | **Saturday July 4** | Start 14:00 – Finish 17:32 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



Utrecht is a city of cyclists but none will have ridden through these streets as fast as the riders of the Tour de France. This 13.8km opening time trial (too long to be classed as a prologue) is on a speedy but technical course. There are 39 turns over the route, and 20 of those are right-angles. It will suit a powerful rider with punchy acceleration and good handling. Fabian Cancellara, are you listening?

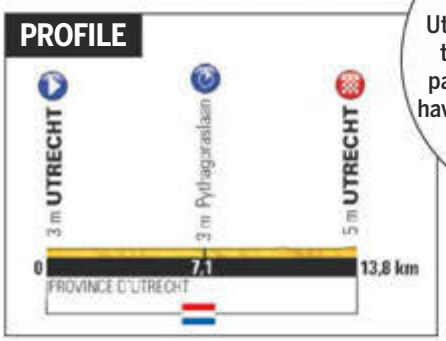
Look out for...
Technically, we've got an uphill finish, but remember we're in the Netherlands. The course starts at 3m above sea level and finishes at 5m above sea level. There's a tricky high-speed chicane or two, and it's all surrounded by typical Dutch street furniture.

Does this TT matter?
They're not going to win or lose the Tour here, but GC riders could easily concede a minute to their rivals. Strong testers Froome and Nibali should fare well, while the likes of Nairo Quintana and Thibaut Pinot will try to give away as little time as possible. Rain has been known to play havoc with opening time trials and could shake things up on this twisty, silky smooth asphalt.

Who does it suit?
The Tour last visited the Netherlands in 2010 with an opening time trial in Rotterdam; Cancellara beat Tony Martin by 10 seconds over 9.8km. Those two will be the ones to watch but so will Giant-Alpecin's local rider Tom Dumoulin. Movistar's Adriano Malori and Alex Dowsett, should they ride, will fancy this too.



PROFILE



STAGE FACT

The stage will finish by Utrecht station, alongside the world's largest bike parking facility, which will have space for 12,500 bikes when it's completed in 2018.

Ag2r La Mondiale

(France)



2015 form
It's been a mixed season for Ag2r's star men — Romain Bardet descended to stage victory at the Dauphiné before crashing out of contention the next day; Domenico Pozzovivo won stages in Catalunya and Trentino only to crash out of the Giro, and Jean-Christophe Péraud won the Critérium International only to disappear for the rest of the season.

Modus operandi
Expectations are sky-high and the whole of France will be hoping for a repeat of last year's revelation, when Péraud finished second overall and Bardet sixth.

Look out for
The definitive moment of Ag2r's pre-Tour season occurred on day five of the Dauphiné, when Bardet burst from the front of the peloton to win with a breathtaking descent, while Péraud was spat out the back. That result will probably confirm Bardet as outright leader, which should free him up to ride as adventurously as ever.

The others from...
Jan Bakelants (Bel), Samuel Dumoulin (Fra), Ben Gastauer (Fra), Blel Kadri (Fra), Sébastien Minard (Fra), Matteo Montaguti (Fra), Jean-Christophe Péraud (Fra), Domenico Pozzovivo (Ita), Christophe Riblon (Fra), Alexis Vuillermoz (Fra).

***CW* says**
Expect to see their climbers just behind the favourites in the mountains.

The kit
Focus bikes, SRAM components.

The boss
Vincent Lavenu.

Stage 2 Utrecht > Zeeland

SPRINT STAGE

166km | **Sunday July 5** | Start 13:15 – Finish 17:17 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



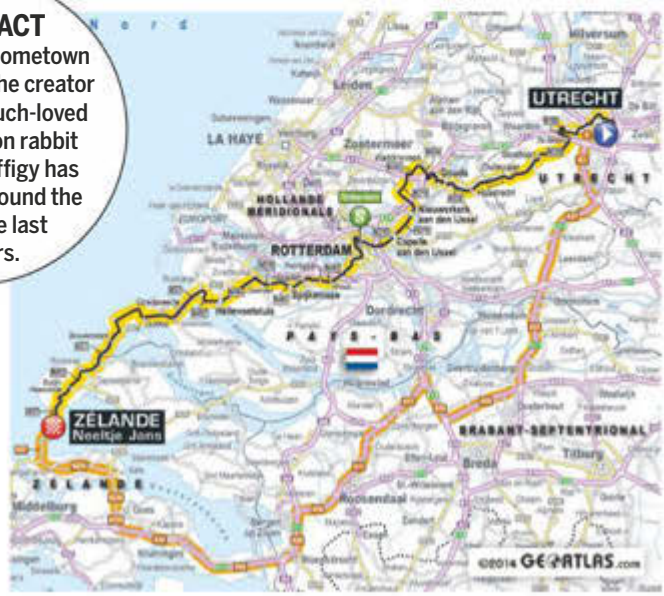
The Tour peloton will head straight into battle on the first road stage of this year's race. The route might be flat as a stroopwafel — a local caramel waffle originating in Gouda — but crosswinds are almost guaranteed as the race heads south-west from Utrecht towards the coast.

Where are we going?
The stage finishes on Neeltje Jans, an artificial island built in the 1980s to facilitate the construction of a huge storm surge barrier (so big that it is considered by some architects to be the eighth wonder of the world). The island is now home to a nature reserve, a theme park and an aquarium where you can go swimming with sharks.

Echelons!
There's a fine art to riding in the crosswinds. The bunch tends to form a diagonal shape pointing into the wind until the riders at the back are right in the gutter. GC teams will be fighting to keep themselves — and their team leaders — close to the front of the pack. With the final 40km right along the coast, it's going to mean a brutal day out.

What could happen?
The spectacular 13th stage of the 2013 Tour, where Quick Step blew the race to bits and Mark Cavendish won the stage, shows just how devastating splits in the crosswinds can be. Some riders, like Pierre Rolland and Alejandro Valverde, lost 10 minutes that day.

STAGE FACT
Utrecht is the hometown of Dick Bruna, the creator of Miffy, the much-loved literary cartoon rabbit whose giant effigy has been driven around the Tour for the last few years.



PROFILE



Astana
(Kazakhstan)



2015 form
After a relatively quiet start to the season, during which the main talking point was whether or not they'd keep their WorldTour licence following multiple doping offences, the team demonstrated extraordinary strength at the Giro by winning five mountain stages and finishing second and third overall with Fabio Aru and Mikel Landa.

Modus operandi
To win the Tour, by any means necessary — means that in the past included the dark arts of doping. They achieved that feat last year with Vincenzo Nibali, a rider with a far cleaner track record than his predecessors.

Look out for
Nibali is seeking to retain his title, although his form is impossible to gauge following a Dauphiné which saw him throw in the towel seemingly prematurely, before going on the attack and taking the lead, and then, a few days later, inexplicably riding as a domestique.

The others from...
Fabio Aru (Ita), Lars Boom (Ned), Jakob Fuglsang (Den), Andriy Grivko (Ukr), Dmitriy Gruzdev (Kaz), Tanel Kangert (Est), Michele Scarponi (Ita), Alessandro Vanotti (Ita), Lieuwe Westra (Ned).

***CW* says**
Unlike last year, Nibali is not the standout climber in the race, but has enough nous and tricks up his sleeve to ensure a podium finish.

The kit
Specialized bikes, Campag components.

The boss
Alexandre Vinokourov.

ROLLING STAGE

Stage 3 Antwerp > Huy

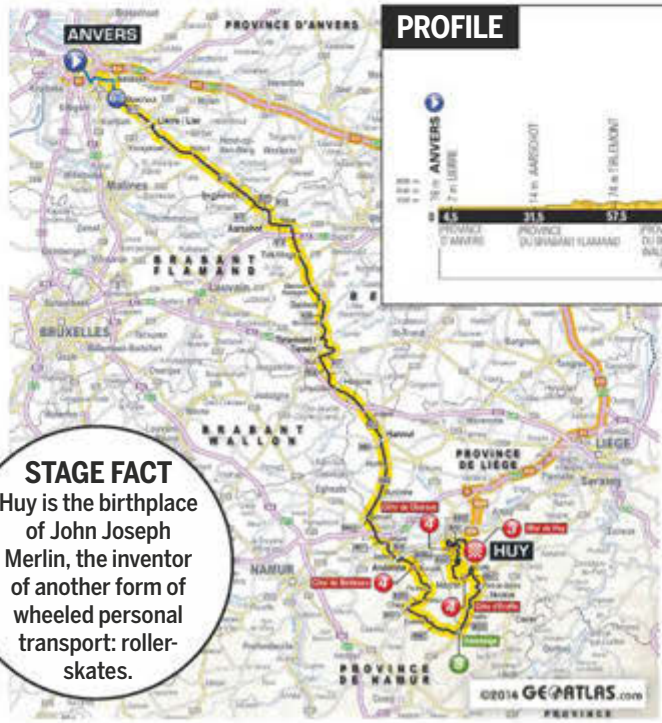
159.5km | **Monday July 6** | Start 13:10 – Finish 17:17 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



3/5 2/5 2/5



PROFILE



STAGE FACT
Huy is the birthplace of John Joseph Merlin, the inventor of another form of wheeled personal transport: roller-skates.

Bonjour les Belges! The Tour hops across the border to Belgium for the second day on the road with a stage that seems designed as an homage to the one-day Classic Flèche Wallonne. The race heads south-east from the port city of Antwerp (also the world's largest diamond centre) and into the hills of Wallonia. There are four categorised climbs on the route, culminating with a dash up the terrifyingly steep Mur de Huy.

Location, location
After the echelons, today is another one of those days where position in the bunch will be the key to success or failure. A rider finding himself at the back of the bunch approaching one of the short, sharp climbs could risk losing ground, getting caught behind a crash, or frantically chasing back up. Timing is going to be as important as stamina.

Tell me more about this finish…
The 'Huy Wall', or Chemin des Chappelles, to give it its proper name, is 1.3km with an average gradient of 9.6 per cent. So what's the fuss about? The final few hundred metres of this twisty, narrow road kick up to over 20 per cent, hence the name. Whether in a Classic or Tour de France stage, it's a nasty way to end a bike race.

Did this year's Flèche Wallonne tell us anything?
Alejandro Valverde has won three editions of the Flèche Wallonne Classic, most recently in April this year. Chris Froome, on the other hand, crashed in the 2015 race and limped up the road to the finish. Whatever happens, it's quite possible we'll see the yellow jersey change hands at the end of the day.

BMC
(Switzerland)



2015 form
The best of their 13 wins came courtesy of Philippe Gilbert, who came home from the Giro with a couple of stage victories to his name. But their season has been full of near misses, with Greg Van Avermaet again podiuming in multiple Classics without winning any, while Tejay van Garderen came just a few metres from sealing the Dauphiné overall.

Modus operandi
BMC haven't quite got the Tour right recently, failing to win a single stage since Cadel Evans triumphantly won the yellow jersey in 2011 despite a line-up that included some of the biggest names in the sport. Now they look a bit more like a coherent team than a collection of stars, and will work together to target the team time trial and van Garderen's GC bid.

Look out for
The one success story from BMC's recent Tours has been van Garderen, who finished fifth in both 2012 and 2014. The 26-year- showed his potential by nearly defeating Froome at the Dauphiné.

The others from…
Marcus Burghardt (Bel), Rohan Dennis (Aus), Philippe Gilbert (Bel), Daniel Oss (Ita), Manuel Quinziato (Ita), Taylor Phinney (USA), Samuel Sanchez (Spa), Peter Stetina (USA), Greg Van Avermaet (Bel), Peter Velits (Svk)

***CW* says**
There's a danger that van Garderen has peaked too early.

The kit
BMC bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Jim Ochowicz

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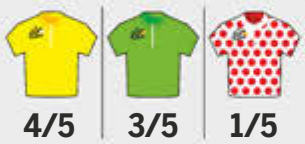
Stage 4 Seraing > Cambrai

COBBLES

223.5km | **Tuesday July 7** | Start 12:00 – Finish 17:24 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



4/5 | 3/5 | 1/5

For the second year in succession, the Tour tackles the cobbles of northern France. This time around, there are seven sectors totalling 13.3km, coming towards the end of a long day in the saddle from Seraing, just outside Liège, to Cambrai.

'Less technical, more physical'

So said the Tour's course director Thierry Gouvenou, of this year's *secteurs pavés* compared to last year. This year's cobbled stage is hillier than 2014's, and almost half of the 13.3km is saved for the final two sectors: Fontaine-au-Tertre to Quiévy is 3,700m and Avesnes-les-Aubert to Carnières is 2,300m long.

When the riders emerge from there, tired and mud-splattered, it's just 10km to the finish in Cambrai.

Can we expect the same as last year?

Undoubtedly so. There will be a surprise package; last year it was Vincenzo Nibali who took more than 2.5 minutes out of Alberto Contador. There will probably be one high-profile victim, too. Last year it was Chris Froome (although he crashed out before the stones even began) and in 2010, it was Frank Schleck, who fell and broke his collarbone.

What to look our for

This is a great stage for a day trip from the UK, and it's not all muddy farm tracks and turnip fields (though there is a lot of that). The stately town of Cambrai was home to the Duke of Wellington's HQ following the Battle of Waterloo 200 years ago, in 1815, and later, in 1917, it saw the first large-scale deployment of tanks during WWI. If you're here to watch the cobbles, make sure you sample some of the town's famous boiled sweets called *bêtises*, a name that roughly translates as 'stupid mistakes'.

TIME SCHEDULE

Place / secteur pavé	from the finish	from the start	ETA (CET)
Seraing (Start)	223.5km	0km	12.00
Côte de la Citadelle de Namur (Cat 4)	170.5km	53km	13.20
Pont-à-Celles to Gouy-lez-Piéton (1,800m)	120km	103.5km	14.33
Havay (Sprint)	86.5km	137km	15.21
D'Artes to Famars (1,200m)	46km	177.5km	14.18
Quérénaing to Verchain-Maugré (1,600m)	40.5km	183km	16.26
Verchain-Maugré to Saulzoir (1,200m)	36km	187.5km	16.33
Saint-Python (1,500m)	26km	197.5km	16.47
Fontaine-au-Tertre to Quiévy (3,700m)	23.5km	200km	16.51
D'Avesnes-les-Aubert to Carniéres (2,300m)	13km	210.5km	17.06
Cambrai (Finish)	0km	223.5km	17.24

PROFILE



Bora-Argon 18
(Germany)



2015 form

The German-registered Pro-Continental team enjoyed a stellar Bayern Rundfahrt, with Sam Bennett claiming two stages and Jan Barta finishing third overall. The season highlight, though, was the surprise team time trial win at Giro del Trentino.

Modus operandi

As NetApp-Endura, the team impressed in their debut Tour last July, with Leopold König riding himself into the top 10. With the Czech rider having since moved on to Sky though, their priorities will be revised towards hunting for stage wins.

Look out for

Ireland's Sam Bennett has continued to develop as a bunch sprinter this year, getting the better of such big names as Nacer Bouhanni and John Degenkolb for his three victories this season. A stage win at the Tour seems beyond him for now given that this will be his first Grand Tour, but he could still be up there in the sprints.

The others from...

Shane Archbold (NZl), Jan Barta (Cze), Zak Dempster (NZl), Bartosz Huzarski (Pol), José Mendes (Por), Dominik Nerz (Ger), Andreas Schillinger (Ger), Björn Thurau (Ger), Paul Voss (Ger).

***CW* says**

They don't possess the quality to land a stage, but should give the sponsors plenty of airtime in breakaways.

The kit

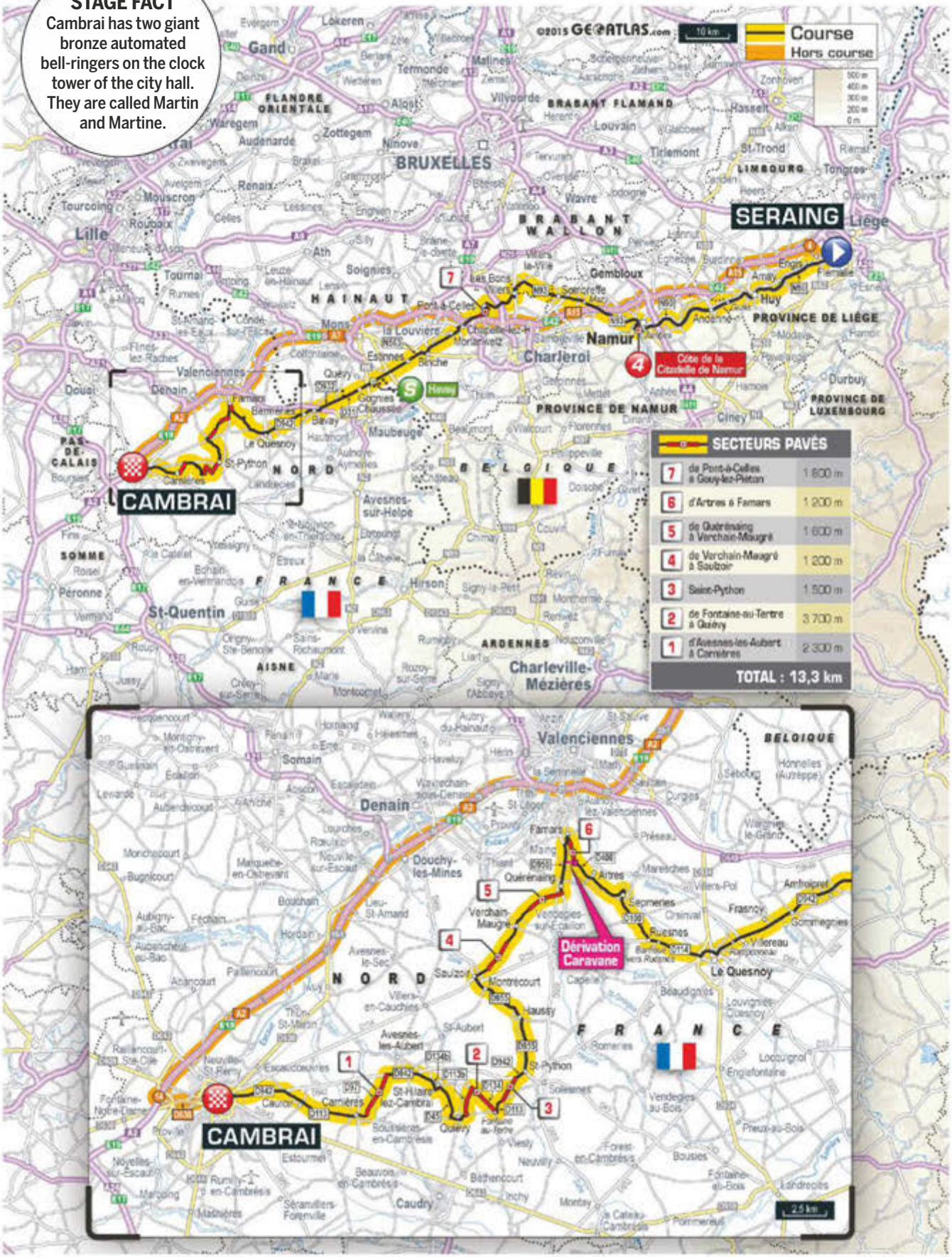
Argon bikes, Shimano components.

The boss

Ralph Denk.

STAGE FACT

Cambrai has two giant bronze automated bell-ringers on the clock tower of the city hall. They are called Martin and Martine.



Stage 5 Arras > Amiens

SPRINT STAGE

189.5km | **Wednesday July 8** | Start 12:45 – Finish 17:07 CET



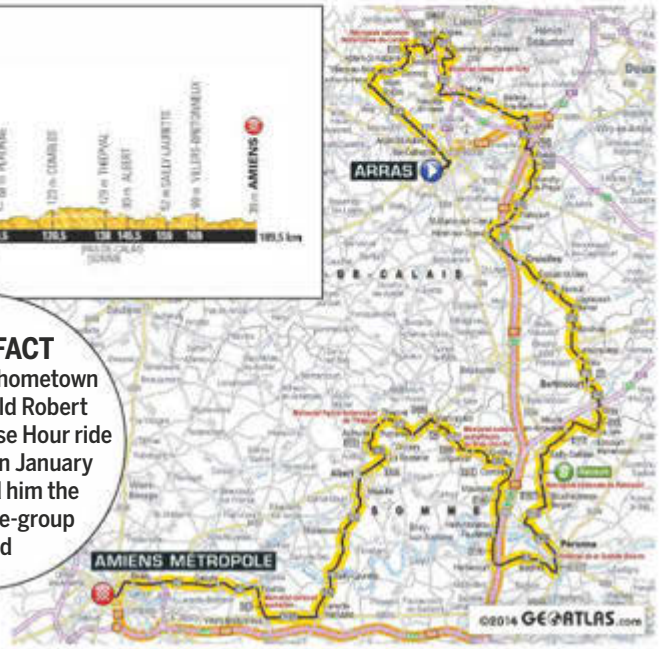
IMPACT ON THE RACE



1/5 5/5 1/5

PROFILE





Normal service is resumed on Tour after a classic opening four days. The pure sprinters will be rewarded for making it this far, with a dishy sprint finish into Amiens at the end of a circuitous route through the Picardy countryside, beginning in the ancient town of Arras.

Anything worth seeing?
While the peloton follows the usual format of breakaway, chase, catch, sprint, let's talk about Arras. It has a remarkable network of underground tunnels called the Boves, built in the 10th century as primitive subterranean links between people's cellars. They were extended by soldiers in WWI to tunnel underneath enemy lines and surprise the Germans. Today's route passes military cemeteries.

STAGE FACT
Amiens is the hometown of 103-year-old Robert Marchand, whose Hour ride of 26.927km in January 2014 earned him the 100-plus age-group record

And on the route?
Full of chateaux, rolling fields (no doubt some with sunflowers) and long, open roads, Picardy is classic Tour sprint stage territory. Previous winners on stages into Amiens include Mario Cipollini and Andre Darrigade, the greatest French sprinter of all time, with 22 stage wins during the Fifties and Sixties. There's a good reason to get to Amiens in a hurry: the local cuisine includes duck paté in pastry, leek tarts, cheesy crêpes and Amiens macaroons. Yum.

Fast finish
There shouldn't be anything too tricky on the stage but it will be a long, tiring day nonetheless, and not as flat as the sprinters would hope. But with relatively few pure sprint days on offer this year, expect a frantic and full-on fast finish with the big sprint teams jostling for position.

Bretagne-Séché Environnement (France)



2015 form
They may not have featured much on our TVs but the Pro Continental French squad are enjoying a strong season in cycling's second tier. They're currently ranked first in the Europe Tour thanks in part to Pierrick Fédrigo's consistently high placings in small French races and Eduardo Sepulveda's second overall at the Tour of Turkey.

Modus operandi
Just as Wimbledon reserves many of its wildcard invitations for plucky low-ranked British tennis players, the Tour always welcomes at least one obscure French team to zealously ride alongside the stars. Bretagne-Seche-Environment are sure to honour that invite by placing in as many breaks as feasibly possible.

Look out for
Nearing the end of his career, Pierrick Fedrigo's tally of four Tour stage wins is about as much as a rider with his limited ability could hope to achieve. Can he add just one more?

The others from...
Frederic Brun (Fra), Anthony Delaplace (Fra), Brice Feillu (Fra), Armindo Fonseca (Fra), Arnaud Gérard (Fra), Florian Guillou (Fra), Pierre-Luc Périchon (Fra), Eduardo Sepulveda (Arg), Florian Vachon (Fra)

***CW* says**
About as much a chance of winning a stage as Tim Henman had of winning Wimbledon.

The kit
Look bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Emmanuel Hubert.

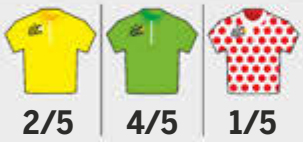
ROLLING STAGE

Stage 6 Abbeville > Le Havre

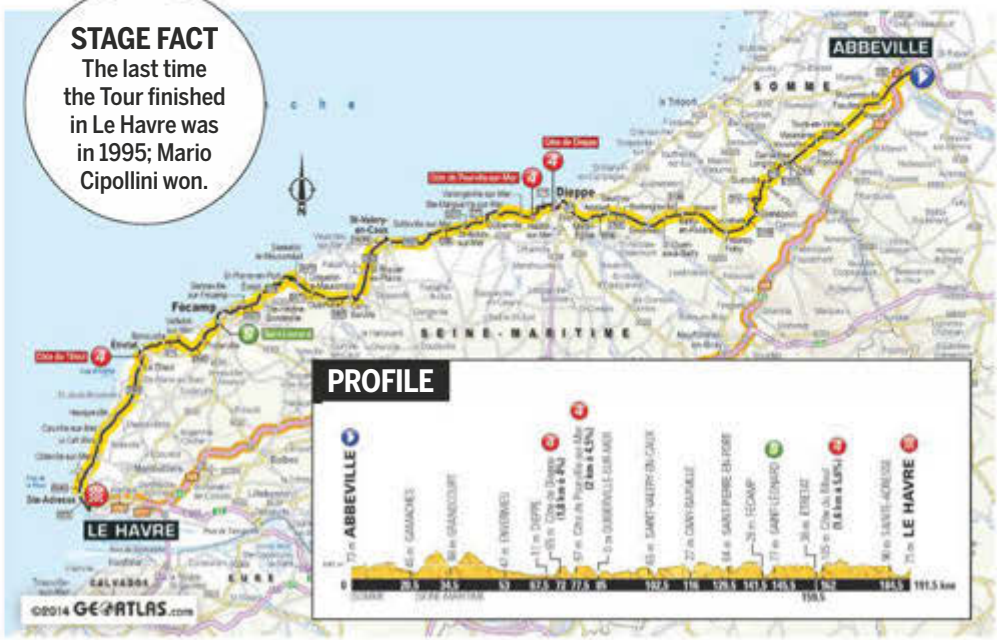
191.5km | **Thursday July 9** | Start 12:40 – Finish 17:22 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



STAGE FACT
The last time the Tour finished in Le Havre was in 1995; Mario Cipollini won.



The race continues its march south-west, once again returning to the coast for some more hi-jinks in the wind. However, the Norman coastline is very different to that in the Netherlands and a succession of tough hills along the cliffs between Dieppe and Le Havre could make things very interesting indeed.

Read the roadbook
There are at least 13 tricky climbs on this stage but only three are categorised. Following 120km by the sea, the finish is on a little hill into Le Havre that packs a 7.6 per cent average gradient into 750m. It's one of those delicately balanced days that could favour the sprinters, the Classics men, or even a plucky breakaway.

Norman invasion
Dieppe has ferry links to Newhaven, and you can sail from Portsmouth to Le Havre; we expect plenty of Brits to head over to France to watch the race. If you're one of them, take your bike and head to the seaside for some *moules frites*. Etretat, 30km from Le Havre via country lanes, also has some spectacular white cliffs.

And if it's raining?
…Which it could well be. Then enjoy the best of Norman cheese, crepes, cider and Calvados (apple brandy) in downtown Le Havre. It's a city with an interesting collection of museums and modern architecture. Perfect to soak up the atmosphere of a Tour finish before catching what will be a scintillating and unpredictable dash to the line.

Cannondale-Garmin
(USA)



2015 form
A sluggish start to the season that failed to produce a single win until late March finally got going at the Giro, where youngster Davide Formolo took a memorable stage and Ryder Hesjedal rode a brilliant final week to finish fifth.

Modus operandi
These are the ideas men of professional cycling. The innovative approach of Vaughters, Wegelius and co. has made for many an exciting day at the Tour — take Ramunas Navardauskas's stage win in the rain last year as a prime example.

Look out for
Dan Martin and Andrew Talansky look set to form a two-pronged attack in the mountains, a strategy the team is fond of. Neither is the kind of rider content to just follow wheels, so expect to see them working together to get into dangerous breaks on rolling terrain.

The others from...
Jack Bauer (NZL), André Cardoso (Por), Nathan Haas (Aus), Alex Howes (USA), Benjamin King (USA), Kristijan Koren (Slo), Sebastian Langeveld (Ned), Ramunas Navardauskas (Ltu), Dylan van Baarle (Ned).

***CW* says**
Both Talansky and Martin are capable of placing in the lower echelons of the top 10, but perhaps a bid for the polka-dot jersey would be more appealing for a team that likes to ride on the front foot.

The kit
Cannondale bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Jonathan Vaughters.

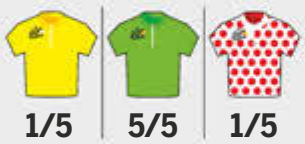
Stage 7 Livarot > Fougères

SPRINT STAGE

190.5km | **Friday July 10** | Start 12:40 – Finish 17:22 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



It's the stage that the farming co-operatives of France have been waiting for. Livarot, a start town for the first time in its history, is a tiny place but happens to be home to an eponymous pungent cheese of national renown. Expect plenty of aerial shots of field displays featuring tractors, hay bales and cows.

Cheese rolling

The stage, the fourth in a row to total nearly 200km, heads back inland to deepest Normandy, featuring rolling hills, tiny hamlets (for whom the Tour is the biggest thing to happen in 20 years) and typical small rural roads. Expect a breakaway made up of French Pro Continental riders to be caught with a few kilometres to go and the stage to end in a sprint finish. Forget the mountains — this stage exemplifies the *real* Tour de France.

Always watch out for the quiet ones

Of course, something always happens around one week into the Tour, just when you're least expecting it. The natural selection of the mountains is yet to settle the bunch and there are still fresh legs spinning, even if the fatigue of a week on the road begins to set in. Don't write this stage off as nothing more than a textbook sprint finish.

Textbook sprint finish

That said, the flat finish in Fougères does indeed suit the sprinters. Kittel and Cav won't have a chance to look up, but if they did they'd see that the town is home to a mighty medieval fortress with 13 gothic towers.

STAGE FACT

Fougères hosted a 75km team time trial in 1985. La Vie Claire smashed it, catapulting Bernard Hinault to the last ever French Tour victory.



PROFILE



Cofidis

(France)



2015 form

Much was expected of new signing Nacer Bouhanni when he was signed for this season and he burst thrillingly into form at the Dauphiné, where he won a couple of stages with two blisteringly quick sprints. Elsewhere they've not much to show bar a few minor French wins.

Modus operandi

While the likes of FDJ and Ag2r betray the recent French tradition by actually being quite good, we can still rely on Cofidis to embark on doomed breakaways and fight for the points on every category-four climb and minor intermediate sprint.

Look out for

That said, with new sprinter Bouhanni, they may make more of an impression on the Tour this time. Finally participating in his first Grand Boucle, having won stages at the Giro and Vuelta last year, the boxing enthusiast still seems like a star in the making.

The others from...

Nicolas Edet (Fra), Cyril Lemoine (Fra), Luis Angel Mate (Spa), Rudy Molard (Fra), Daniel Navarro (Spa), Adrien Petit (Fra), Julien Simon (Fra), Geoffrey Soupe (Fra)

***CW* says**

Their sprint-train will struggle to compete with the better-established teams in the hurly burly of the bunch sprints, but Bouhanni will certainly be keen to challenge Cav and Kittel for wins.

The kit

Orbea bikes, Shimano components.

The boss

Yvon Sanquer.

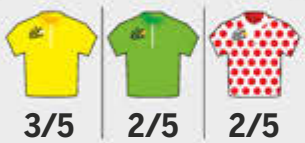
ROLLING STAGE

Stage 8 Rennes > Mûr-de-Bretagne

181.5km | **Saturday July 11** | Start 12:40 – Finish 17:19 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE





Mûr-de-Bretgane wasn't named after the French for 'wall,' but with the long straight road into town hitting an average of 8.4 per cent over 1.3km, it might as well have been. The climb featured regularly in the Tour until in 2011 it was used as a stage finish for the first time. That day Cadel Evans outgunned Alberto Contador to the line and went on to win the Tour outright.

STAGE FACT
When he wasn't commentating, legendary Tour announcer Daniel Mangeas liked nothing more than to go to Rennes to watch his beloved football club Stade Rennais.

Fast and furious
It's basically an uphill sprint finish for the GC riders, and with a flat run-in to the bottom of the climb, the GC teams will be doing full-on lead-outs to position their leaders. While the pure sprinters will be thinking about the rest day and saving their legs for the mountains, the stage will also be high on the list for *puncheurs* like Philippe Gilbert and world champion Michal Kwiatkowski.

Local favourites
You can put good money on local team Bretagne-Séché Environnement getting into the breakaway today as the route heads west from the squad's HQ in Rennes for its final day of racing in northern France. Brittany has a long affinity with cycling; the route passes through St-Méen-le-Grand, the birthplace of Louison Bobet, the first man to win three consecutive Tours from 1953-55, and the Breton Badger Bernard Hinault hails from nearby St Brieuc. Indeed, today's route goes close to Dinan, where today Hinault lives on a farm and keeps donkeys.

PROFILE



Etixx-Quick Step
(Belgium)



2015 form
By the ludicrously high standards set in recent seasons, Etixx's season has arguably been a disappointment, with lots of near misses in the Classics and Rigoberto Uran faltering at the Giro. But they've nevertheless amassed more wins than any other team, including Michal Kwiatkowski at Amstel Gold and Iljo Keisse on the final day of the Giro, and unearthed a potential new superstar in Julian Alaphilippe.

Modus operandi
The peloton's equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife, Etixx possess a star rider for every kind of scenario at the Tour — Tony Martin for the time trial, Kwiatkowski for hilly stages, Uran for the mountains, Matteo Trentin for selective sprint stages and Zdenek Stybar for the cobbled stage.

Look out for
The terrain that Etixx will really seek to dominate though is on the flat, on which Mark Cavendish is hungry to add to his haul of 25 Tour sprint wins. Their amalgam of talent ought to make for a formidable sprint train.

The others from...
Julian Alaphilippe (Fra), Michal Golas (Pol), Michal Kwiatkowski (Pol), Tony Martin (Ger), Mark Renshaw (Aus), Zdenek Stybar (Cze), Niki Terpstra (Bel), Matteo Trentin (Ita), Rigoberto Uran (Col).

***CW* says**
Another bounty of wins awaits the best team in the world.

The kit
Specialized bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Patrick Lefevere

TEAM TT

Stage 9 Vannes > Plumelec

28km | **Sunday July 12** | Start 15:00 – Finish 17:17 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



It's less than 20 miles long, but today's stage will be one of the ones that the Tour's overall favourites fear the most. It is team time trial day: one of the most physically and technically demanding stages of the whole race. At the end of a long first week, riders will be hoping that they don't slip up and concede crucial seconds going into the first rest day.

As if that wasn't enough
TTT's don't always suit the best time triallists as they demand constant accelerations and decelerations rather than steady state efforts. They also require exceptional teamwork, with the time taken on the fifth rider to cross the line. As a team, do you choose to use up four riders to save the legs of the remaining five? Or do you ride together and share out the work? This TTT is made even trickier by the presence of three climbs, including an uphill finish in Plumelec called the Côte du Cadoudal.

What can we expect?
Some teams rarely practise team time trials so the disparity between top and bottom could be minutes rather than seconds. Orica-GreenEdge and Etixx-Quick Step always do well, while BMC won the TTT at the Critérium du Dauphiné in June. Movistar are pretty handy, as are Astana and Tinkoff-Saxo. Team Sky don't have the best track record in the event, but spare a thought for Ag2r La Mondiale and FDJ.fr. The French hopefuls like Romain Bardet and Thibaut Pinot could hemorrhage time today.

STAGE FACT
Plumelec hosted a TTT finish in 1982 after the Tour's initial TTT on stage five was interrupted by striking steel workers. Organisers stuck an impromptu 69km TTT on the morning of stage nine.



Europcar
(France)



2015 form
The French team have struggled to make an impression since being demoted from the WorldTour in the winter. Bryan Coquard has been prominent in the sprints, while Pierre Rolland won the Vuelta a Castilla y León but faded in bigger races.

Modus operandi
This is team Thomas Voeckler, and over his 15-year career here his personality has been imprinted deep into the squad's DNA. The mostly French roster have adopted the 'plucky underdog' mantle that Voeckler has thrived off, with some even imitating his gurning theatrics when out on their trademark against-the-odds breaks.

Look out for
Now 28, Pierre Rolland has passed the promising youngster phase and now bears the responsibility of being the team's main protected rider ahead of the ageing Voeckler. He loves to attack and does so seemingly out of boredom sometimes, and has a knack for pulling off wins atop iconic mountains.

The others from...
Yukiya Arashiro (Jap), Bryan Coquard (Fra), Cyril Gautier (Fra), Yohann Gène (Fra), Yannick Martinez (Fra), Alexandre Pichot (Fra), Perrig Quemeneur (Fra), Romain Sicard (Fra), Thomas Voeckler (Fra).

***CW* says**
Rolland could bag a high GC placing, stage win or polka-dot jersey.

The kit
Colnago bikes, Campag components.

The boss
Jean-René Bernaudeau.

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Hutchinson Nitro Tyres

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2014 Model



Via Nirone 7 6061 Aluminium Frame, Alu Carbon Forks,
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Reparto Corse RC-471 Brakes,
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Bianchi Via Nirone 7 2300 8S
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Via Nirone 7 Aluminium Frame, Alu Carbon Forks,
FSA Tempo Compact 50/34T Cranks,
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Impulso Aluminium Frame, Alu Carbon Forks,
FSA Omega MegaExo Compact 50-34 Cranks,
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Wilier Montegrappa Elite
£699.99 RRP £998.99
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7005 Aluminium Double Butted Frame, Alu Carbon Forks,
FSA Vero 50/34T Cranks, Shimano Tigara/105 Gears,
Shimano Claris Hubs, Tektro R340 Brakes,
Maxxis Detonator 700x23c Tyres

Wilier Montegrappa Sport
£549.99 RRP £798.99
2014 Model



7005 Aluminium Double Butted Frame,
Alu Carbon Forks, FSA Vero 50/34T Cranks,
Shimano Sora Gears, Shimano Claris Hubs,
Tektro R312 Brakes, Maxxis Detonator Tyres

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Full Carbon Monocoque Frame, Full Carbon Fork,
FSA SLK 386 Evo 50/34T Cranks,
Campagnolo Athena Gears, FSA Energy Brakes,
Fulcrum R4 Wheelset

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2014 Model



Full Carbon Monocoque Frame, Full Carbon Forks,
Shimano R565 50-34T Cranks,
Shimano 105 Gears, Fulcrum Racing Sport Wheelset,
Continental Ultra Sport II 23c Tyres

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2014 Model



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FSA Tempo Compact 50/34T Cranks,
Shimano Sora Gears, Continental Ultra Sport II Tyres

GT GTS Elite
£699.99 RRP £1049.99
2014 Model



GTR Alloy Frame, GTR Carbon Forks,
FSA Gossomer Compact MegaExo 50/34T Cranks,
Shimano 105/Tiagra Gears, Shimano R501 Rims,
Continental Ultrasport Tyres

GT GTS Expert
£549.99 RRP £949.99
2014 Model



GTR Alloy Frame, GTR Carbon Forks,
FSA Vero Compact 50/34T Cranks,
Shimano Tiagra Gears,
Continental Ultra Sport II Tyres

GT GTS Sport
£349.99 RRP £649.99
2014 Model



GTR Alloy Frame, GTR Carbon Forks,
FSA Tempo Compact 50/34T Cranks,
Shimano Claris Gears, Continental Ultra Sport II Tyres

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2013 Model



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Shimano 105 Gears, Fulcrum Racing 7 Wheelset

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HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 10 Tarbes > La Pierre-Saint-Martin

167km | **Tuesday July 14** | Start 12:25 – Finish 16:32 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE

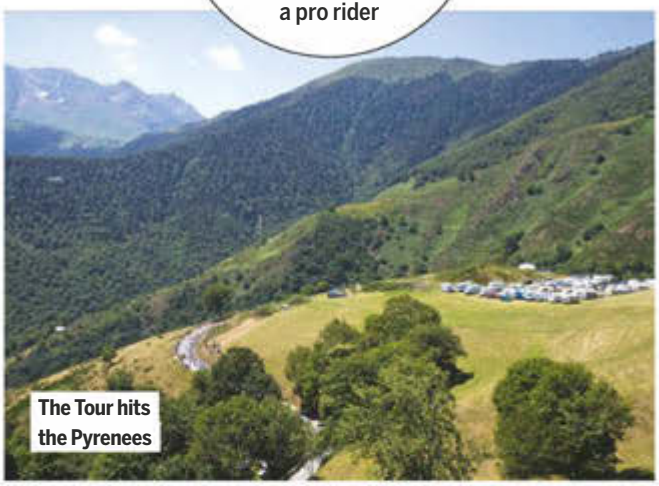


5/5 2/5 4/5

It's the first big summit finish of the Tour following an air transfer down to the south of France for the riders (spare a thought for the team bus drivers) and the first rest day in Pau. Something always happens on a rest day in Pau — generally a positive dope test — so we'll be keeping our fingers crossed for a break in tradition and for chefs in the Tinkoff-Saxo hotel to keep beef off the menu.

STAGE FACT
Cofidis directeur sportif Stéphane Augé used to head up and down the finishing climb for mountain training during his years as a pro rider

Summit finish
This is the Tour's first time up the long climb to La Pierre-St-Martin. Famous for its underground sinkhole, the ski resort is near the top of a col by the same name that crosses into Spain. The climb is hors catégorie — 15.3km at 7.4 per cent average but with typical Pyrenean variations in gradient. It's a tough cookie to cut the ribbon on the high mountains.

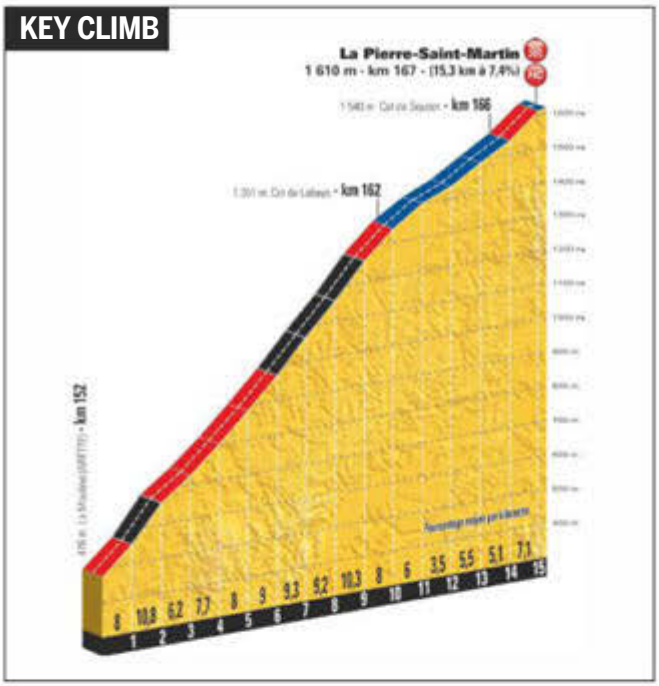


The Tour hits the Pyrenees

Vive la France!
Today is Bastille Day, a national holiday where every good Frenchman, woman and child is expected to wave *la Tricolore* and celebrate *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the Tour de France. The roadside will be full of fans, and patriotic French riders will duly oblige by lighting up the race. If Thomas Voeckler doesn't do something extravagant today then we'll eat our beret.

Santé
It's not all big mountains today — the summit finish is preceded by 150km of mostly rolling roads through the Jurançon wine region (glug), and history shows that the first stage after a rest day always catches some of the riders by surprise.

KEY CLIMB



PROFILE



TIME SCHEDULE

Place	From the finish	From the start	ETA (CET)
Tarbes	167km	0km	12.35
Arrien	145km	22km	13.04
Saint-Castin	129km	38km	13.25
Côte de Bougarber (Cat 4)	101km	66km	14.03
Côte de Vielleségure (Cat 4)	77km	90km	14.35
Trois-Villes (Sprint)	43km	124km	15.20
Côte de Montory (Cat 4)	33km	134km	15.33
La Pierre-Saint-Martin (HC)	0km	167km	16.43

Photo: Cor Vos



FDJ
(France)



2015 form
The steady stream of wins that had flowed to FDJ over the past few years has dried up since star sprinter Nacer Bouhanni was allowed to leave for Cofidis in the winter. So far this year they've had to settle for a summit finish at the Tour of Romandy from Thibaut Pinot, and a couple of Tour of Belgium stage wins for Arnaud Démare, among a few other results.

Modus operandi
Gone are the days when their white jerseys would be seen populating hopeless breaks virtually every day. The emergence of Pinot has seen FDJ move up the peloton ranks, and they now enter the race as a fully fledged GC team.

Look out for
The next Bernard Hinault, aka Thibaut Pinot. OK, so that label has been applied to everyone from Brice Feillu to Sandy Casar, but this one feels like the real deal — he made the French public swoon by finishing on the podium last year, and is youthful enough to defend his best young rider title.

The others from...
William Bonnet (Fra), Mickaël Delage (Fra), Arnaud Démare (Fra), Alexandre Geniez (Fra), Arnold Jeannesson (Fra), Matthieu Ladagnous (Fra), Steve Morabito (Sui), Cédric Pineau (Fra), Jérémy Roy (Fra), Arthur Vichot (Fra).

***CW* says**
Pinot isn't yet strong enough to compete with the big four, but could be best of the rest.

The kit
Lapierre bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Marc Madiot.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 11 Pau > Cauterets

188km | **Wednesday July 15** | Start 11:45 – Finish 17:17 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



5/5 1/5 5/5

The third-category finishing climb of the Côte de Cauterets is hardly the toughest obstacle of this year's race, but coming after five other climbs including the Col d'Aspin and Col du Tourmalet, its 10 per cent sections over 6.4km are likely to make plenty of legs sting.

A stage of two halves

With two third and one fourth-category climb in its opening 100 kilometres, the first half of stage 11 wouldn't look out of place as the medium distance route of your local club's annual cyclo-sportive.

But the action will surely get as heated as mid-July blacktop as the renowned Aspin and Tourmalet mountain passes are tackled in quick succession. Riders will pass through the La Mongie ski station on the ascent of the latter, scene of three Tour stage finishes that were won by riders with links to doping: Bernard Thévenet, Lance Armstrong and Ivan Basso.

Cool runnings

Cauterets's main annual sporting event takes place less than two weeks before the Tour's visit. The Trophée du Grand Vignemale is the town's version of the Three Peaks Cyclo-Cross, even if its 2,717 metres of vertical ascent is far more than that of Pen-y-Ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough combined. Runners frequently have to deal with snow at the top of the main mountain, the Vignemale Pique Longue, and its descent is that steep in places that ropes are used to assist participants.

Foodie heaven

If you like rich food, then the area's local delicacies will be for you. Black Bigorre pork with beans, foie gras stuffed apples and truffle bread (known locally as tastou) are popular dishes in the area. Given what awaits on stage 12, it's unlikely the Team Sky chef Søren Kristiansen will be serving this for dinner.

TIME SCHEDULE

Place	from the finish	from the start	ETA (CET)
Pau	188km	0km	12.05
Côte de Loucrup (Cat 3)	139.5km	48.5km	13.17
Pouzac (Sprint)	131.5km	56.5km	13.29
Côte de Bagneres-de-Bigorre (Cat 4)	126.5km	61.5km	13.37
Côte de Mauvezin (Cat 3)	113.5km	74.5km	13.57
Col d'Aspin (Cat 1)	71km	117km	15.15
Col du Tourmalet (HC)	41km	147km	16.19
Côte de Cauterets (Cat 3)	3.5km	184.5km	17.11
Cauterets (Finish)	0km	188km	17.17

PROFILE



Giant-Alpecin

(Germany)



2015 form

It's been a season of contrasting fortunes for Giant's two star men. Injury has disrupted Marcel Kittel's season and he has completed only 10 days of racing, but in his absence John Degenkolb was on the form of his life in landing a historic Milan-San Remo/ Paris-Roubaix double.

Modus operandi

Giant-Alpecin have recently established themselves as kings of the last three kilometres on flat stages. Calling a German team 'efficient' might be a cliché, but there really is no better word to describe how they waste minimal energy before moving to the front and setting up their sprinter for the win.

Look out for

Kittel is usually the man at the end of the Giant-Alpecin train, and has pulled off four wins in each of the last two Tours, but a lack of fitness could yet see him miss this year's race. In his absence, it would be fascinating to see how Degenkolb measures up against the best sprinters in the world.

The others from...

Warren Barguil (Fra), Bert de Backer (Bel), Koen de Kort (Ned), Tom Dumoulin (Ned), Johannes Frohlinger (Ger), Simon Geschke (Ger), Georg Preidler (Aut), Albert Timmer (Ned), Tom Veelers (Ned)

***CW* says**

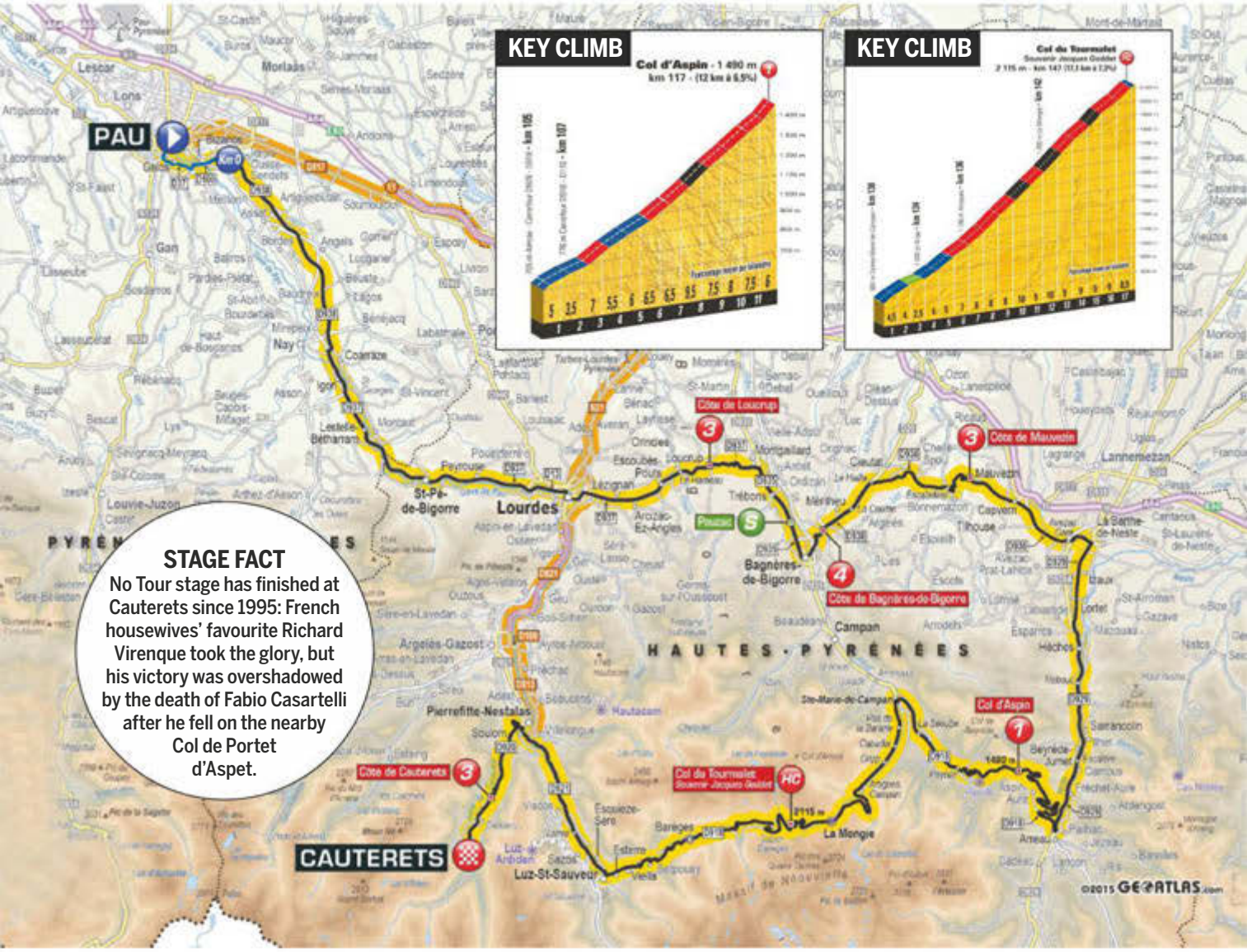
An on-form Degenkolb could win a stage, but a fully fit Kittel would virtually guarantee multiple stage wins.

The kit

Giant bikes, Shimano components.

The boss

Iwan Spekenbrink.



STAGE FACT

No Tour stage has finished at Cauterets since 1995: French housewives' favourite Richard Virenque took the glory, but his victory was overshadowed by the death of Fabio Casartelli after he fell on the nearby Col de Portet d'Aspet.

IAM Cycling

(Switzerland)



2015 form

The transition from Pro Continental to the WorldTour has proven difficult for IAM Cycling, as they currently lie at the bottom of the rankings in their debut season. Matthias Brändle briefly held the Hour record, but wins have been hard to come by.

Modus operandi

Getting into breaks will be the name of the game for IAM Cycling. A stage win would not only make for a successful Tour, but would also be the biggest result in the team's history — and, after so many near misses at the Giro, they seem due a Grand Tour stage win.

Look out for

Sylvain Chavanel may not have won a stage since 2010, but, having ridden in every edition since 2001, few men know better how to engineer a race-winning Tour break. Now in the twilight of his career, the 35-year-old will have to rely more on brains than brawn.

The others from...

Matthias Brändle (Aut), Jérôme Coppel (Fra), Martin Elmiger (Sui), Mathias Frank (Sui), Heinrich Haussler (Aus), Jarlinson Pantano (Col), Matteo Pelucchi (Ita), Jérôme Pineau (Fra), Vicente Reynes (Esp), Marcel Wyss (Sui).

***CW* says**

With so many other teams chasing similar goals, their mix of middling stage racers, veterans and talented youngsters have their work cut out to take something home from this Tour.

The kit

Scott bikes, Shimano components.

The boss

Michel Thétaz.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 12 Lannemezan > Plateau de Beille

195km | **Thursday July 16** | Start 11:10 – Finish 16:57 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



5/5 1/5 5/5

The third day in the Pyrenees is likely to push the eventual race winner to the fore, if not cement their position in the yellow jersey, as the peloton face their toughest summit finish thus far. The 15.8km climb of Plateau de Beille comes at the end of 195km that includes two category-one, and one category-two climbs.

With almost a week between here and the Alpine stages it represents the last chance for a week for a GC contender to gain time. If one of the big four is already in yellow, expect a controlled stage right up until the final five kilometres. If not, it will be interesting to see who takes it on. Whichever team does will have to have complete faith in their leader and his ability to deliver on the steep final slope.

Time for a refresh

Twice before a stage in the Tour has started in Lannemezan and run down to Plateau de Beille — in 2002 and 2004. On both occasions the stage was won by Lance Armstrong, so it feels like this stage needs a fresh start.

Of the five times a stage has finished at this little Pyrenean ski resort, Frenchman Thomas Voeckler has twice been on the podium pulling on the maillot jaune and popping the champagne. Can the erstwhile breakaway rider defy the years and grace the podium again? We doubt it, although it won't be through want of trying.

Toughest of three

With 47.1km of climbing, today's stage is the toughest of the three in the Pyrenees. Once the peloton passes through the town of Aspet after 42km, the rest of the day they will either be climbing or descending.

Expect to see a fast start too. The intermediate sprint is 20km in and the sprinters' teams will want to keep it together at least until then.

If a break doesn't get up the road straight after the sprint, expect it to form on the lower slopes of the Col de Portet d'Aspet. Any polka-dot challengers will have to be in the day's break with 25 points on offer, before the final climb is contested.

STAGE FACT

It's 20 years since the tragic death of Italian Fabio Casartelli on the descent of the Portet d'Aspet. The race is likely to pay its respects at the start.



A tough finish awaits tired legs

PROFILE



TIME SCHEDULE

Place	from the finish	from the start	ETA (CET)
Lannemezan	195km	0km	11.10
Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Sprint)	175km	20km	11.44
Payssous	162km	33km	12.04
Col de Portet-d'Aspet (Cat 2)	137.5km	57.5km	12.47
Col de la Core (Cat 1)	102km	93km	13.59
Biert	71km	124km	14.40
Port de Lers (Cat 1)	51km	144km	15.26
Plateau de Beille (HC)	0km	195km	16.57

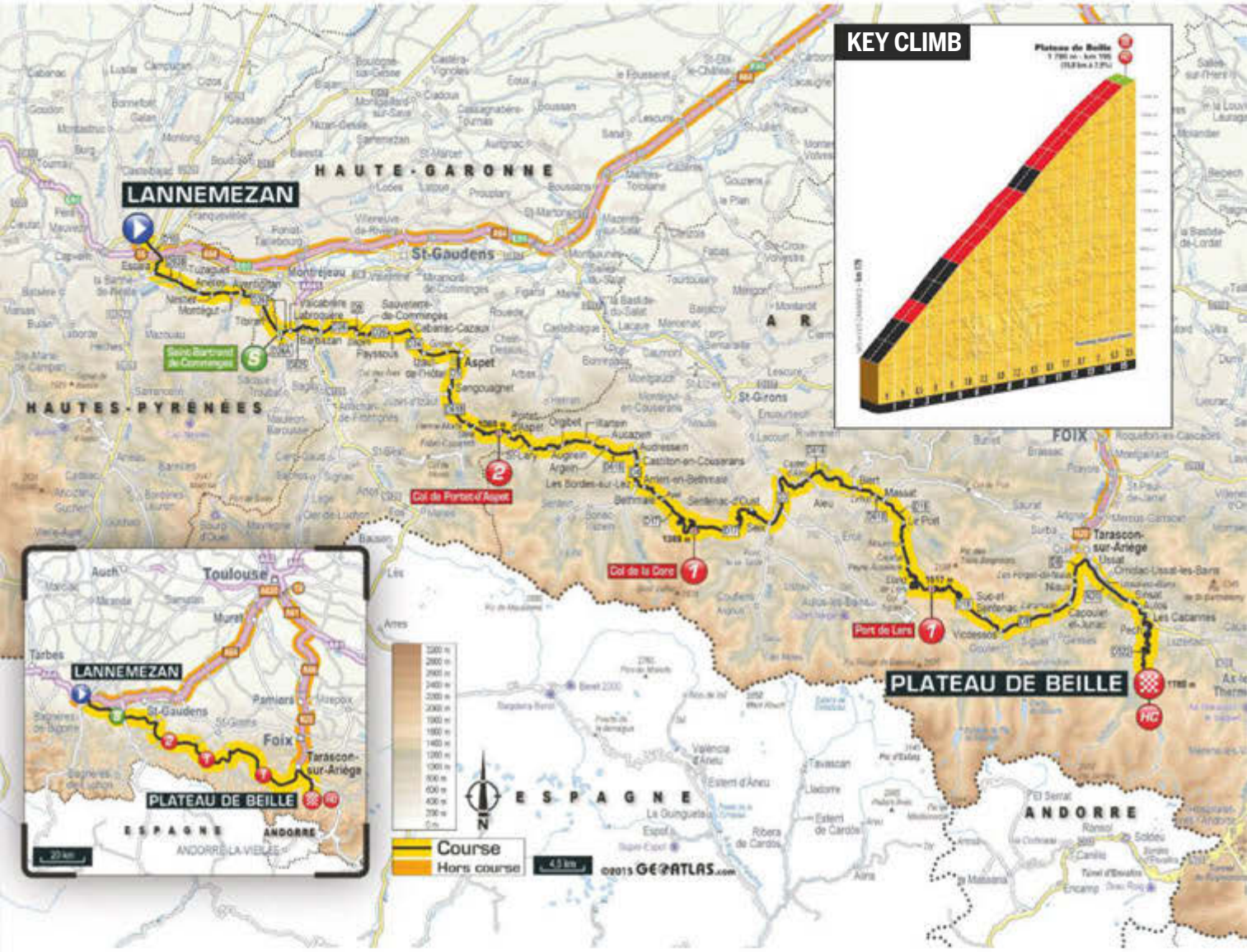
KEY CLIMB



KEY CLIMB



Photo: Cor Vos



Katusha
(Russia)



2015 form
After six years of thwarted ambition, Katusha have finally enjoyed a season with an abundance of success — Ilnur Zakarin won the Tour of Romandy and a stage of the Giro; Joaquim Rodríguez the Tour of the Basque Country; Luca Paolini a thrilling Ghent-Wevelgem; Alexander Kristoff the Tour of Flanders and Simon Spilak the Tour de Suisse.

Modus operandi
A team bursting with talent, but without one clear objective for them to all rally round. As such, expect them to intermittently instigate breaks, close down breaks, lead out sprints and attack in the mountains.

Look out for
Alexander Kristoff has been 2015's star rider, and looks set for an almighty tussle with Peter Sagan. Both will target similar stages, with Kristoff being the slightly better sprinter and Sagan the slightly better climber.

The others from...
Giampaolo Caruso (Ita), Alberto Losada (Esp), Tiago Machado (Por), Daniel Moreno (Esp), Alexander Porsev (Rus), Joaquim Rodríguez (Esp), Gatis Smukulis (Lat), Simon Spilak (Slo), Vladimir Isaichev (Rus), Yuri Trofimov (Rus).

***CW* says**
Kristoff will close the gap but not better his second-place finish in the points classification, with Sagan to prove too formidable a foe, while Rodríguez should finish around sixth on GC.

The kit
Canyon bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Viatcheslav Ekimov.

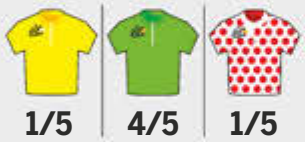
Stage 13 Muret > Rodez

SPRINT STAGE

198.5km | **Friday July 17** | Start 12:20 – Finish 17:17 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



After three days of summit finishes in the Pyrenees, the peloton heads north-east into the department of Aveyron. A far easier day than what came before, there are only three lowly categorised climbs and the main contenders will likely treat it as an unofficial rest day. One uncategorised climb comes 10km before the end, while the finish culminates with a 400m rise at a gradient of 9.6 per cent.

Sprint or breakaway?
Could go either way. Traditionally you'd think this is classic breakaway territory but in more recent years sprinters' teams have kept things together over tougher parcours. The finish atop Rodez's Côte Saint-Pierre doesn't lend itself to pure gallopers, but certainly the more robust men like Peter Sagan and Michael Matthews might well fancy their chances.

Has the Tour been here before?
While Muret has welcomed the Route du Sud before, it is the Tour's first ever visit. Rodez, stage hosts for the third time after first hosting a finish in 1984, held a start five years ago, which Alexandre Vinokourov won at the finish in Revel. Could this be an omen for the Astana team that the Kazakh now manages?

What's on the menu?
An abundance of cheese. The local speciality is Aligot. Made from mashed potatoes, crème fraiche, garlic and melted local cheese (usually Tomme cheese), it is served with grilled or roasted meat.

STAGE FACT
Rodez dates back to at least the fifth century BC. It has been occupied by Celts, Romans, Franks, Visigoths, Moors and, during the 100 Years War, the English.



PROFILE



Lampre-Merida

(Italy)



2015 form
This has been Lampre's best season for years, the highlight being a team record of four stage wins at the Giro shared between Sacha Modolo, Diego Ulissi and Jan Polanc. Elsewhere Rui Costa won a stage and finished third overall at the Dauphiné, Kristijan Durasek won the Tour of Turkey and a stage at the Tour de Suisse, and Rafa Valls won the Tour of Oman.

Modus operandi
Like an aloof tourist who turns their nose up at local food, Lampre-Merida don't have the enthusiasm for the Tour compared with their beloved Giro d'Italia. Most of their A-list riders target the Italian race, leaving a weakened Tour roster that usually fails to make an impression.

Look out for
One star man who will be riding the Tour is Rui Costa. As a rider who looks like a world-beater in week-long stage races yet has never made a Grand Tour top 10, he'll concentrate on adding more crafty stage wins to his Tour career total of three.

The others from...
Matteo Bono (Ita), Davide Cimolai (Ita), Kristijan Durasek (Cro), Nelson Oliveira (Por), Ruben Plaza (Esp), Filippo Pozzato (Ita), Maximiliano Richeze (Arg), Jose Serpa (Col), Rafael Valls (Esp).

***CW* says**
We won't see much of their purple jerseys over the three weeks, until Rui Costa pops up with a stage win.

The kit
Merida bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Giuseppe Saronni.

MEDIUM MOUNTAINS

Stage 14 Rodez > Mende

178.5km | **Saturday July 18** | Start 12:35 – Finish 17:00 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



STAGE FACT
Today's route runs just a little bit north of that of the Tour de Mont Aigoual, the fictional race at which Tim Krabbe's classic book *The Rider* is set.

PROFILE



A low-key airfield situated high above the Massif Central town of Mende is the unlikely location for repeat visits from the Tour. But they've kept coming back here every five years since the relatively local Laurent Jalabert sealed two Bastille Day victories here in 1995 and 2000. In fact the Côte de la Croix Neuve climb up to the airfield has been semi-officially renamed in his honour.

What's the Montée Laurent Jalabert like?

It's a second-category number, short and steep, averaging 10 per cent over three winding kilometres. Joaquim Rodríguez attacked to get the win last time the Tour visited in 2010.

What else is on the way?

The roads are heavy going in the Massif Central, continually up and down. But then the race drops into the Tarn Valley for 80km, passing beneath the 343m high viaduct at Millau before very gradually winding its way between the spectacular cliffs of the river's gorge. The second-cat Côte de Sauveterre finally lifts the route away from the Tarn and there's a quick fourth-cat climb before the fireworks start at Mende.

What will happen?

It's a bit too special to be simply be considered a transition day given that the final climb suits a very certain style of rider — the explosive climber who might also have figured at Huy and Mûr de Bretagne. Nonetheless, an early break may be allowed the slip. Although the Tour won't be won or lost here, the final climb is severe enough for swordplay between the contenders. Unless something goes drastically wrong the time differences will be seconds rather than minutes.

LottoNL-Jumbo
(Netherlands)



2015 form
Not good. It took them until May to register their first victory of the season, and they haven't added another since. Sep Vanmarcke and Steven Kruijswijk may have been among the chief animators of the Spring Classics and Giro respectively, but neither scored a win.

Modus operandi
The less successful older brother of the Rabo-Liv women's squad, their dream of winning yellow turned into a nightmare when, in 2007, Michael Rasmussen was kicked off the Tour while wearing the maillot jaune for a doping violation. Since then a succession of Dutch riders have tried and failed to make the podium.

Look out for
The latest in that line is 24-year-old Wilco Kelderman. A strong climber, time triallist and fast finisher, he appears to be the complete package, and came seventh in the Giro last year.

The others from...
Kevin de Weert (Bel), Robert Gesink (Ned), Steven Kruijswijk (Ned), Thomas Leezer (Ned), Paul Martens (Ger), Bram Tankink (Ned), Laurens Ten Dam (Ned), Jos Van Emden (Ned), Sep Vanmarcke (Bel), Maarten Wynants (Bel).

***CW* says**
The team are in desperate need of some success, and possess no rider currently capable of pushing for the podium. If they ride aggressively and ambitiously they could land a stage win from a breakaway.

The kit
Bianchi bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Richard Plugge.

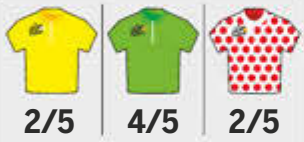
Stage 15 Mende > Valence

SPRINT STAGE

183km | **Sunday July 19** | Start 11:00 – Finish 17:09 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



2/5 | 4/5 | 2/5



STAGE FACT
The Port de l'Epervière, in Valence, is the largest river port in France. It is only a day trip from the Mediterranean.

For the second successive stage, the previous day's finish town is the stage start. Mende waves the peloton off towards an undulating first 125km — including the ascent of the 8km Col de l'Escrinet — before a fast and flat finish that will tempt the sprinters' teams.

Where are we?
We're in the Rhône-Alpes region though the finishing city of Valence, in the south of the region, has only ever been included in one edition of the Tour, back in 1996 when it was used as a finish and a start. The Rhône valley can be prone to wind so echelons may form alongside the vineyards and fruit orchards if conditions require them.

What can we expect?
The run-in along the river lends itself to a bunch sprint for the fast men although if the aforementioned wind blows up the valley from behind it could assist a break staying away. But the Champs-Elysées aside this is really the only stage in the second two weeks of the Tour that looks geared up for a bunch sprint. Teams with a chance are not going to let the opportunity slip from their grasp easily.

But won't sprinters be daunted by that climb?
The second cat, 14km, Col de l'Escrinet has only featured in the Tour once before, in 2009, when its 787m summit was 16km before the end. Mark Cavendish described it as "not a stage for me" yet he defied even his own predictions, and sprinted to his fifth stage win of the Tour in Aubernas.

PROFILE



Lotto-Soudal
(Belgium)



2015 form
An impressive season reached its apex during a purple patch in mid-March, when André Greipel and Tony Gallopin won stages of Paris-Nice, and Jens Debusschere a bunch sprint at Tirreno-Adriatico, all in the space of just five days. Since then Greipel executed a perfect lead-out to win a Giro stage, and Kris Boeckmans has hoovered up smaller races.

Modus operandi
Having spent years lurking in the shadow of their more successful compatriots Quick-Step, Lotto-Soudal has reinvented itself this season as a rebellious force in the peloton, seeking to disrupt the status quo with aggressive tactics and unpredictable attacks.

Look out for
André Greipel's always good for a stage win — he's delivered at least one in all four of his Tour participations, and is currently on a streak of winning stages in each of the last eight Grand Tours he has entered.

The others from...
Lars Bak (Den), Tony Gallopin (Fra), Thomas de Gendt (Bel), Adam Hansen (Aus), Greg Henderson (NZl), Jurgen Roelandts (Bel), Marcel Sieberg (Ger), Jelle Vanendert (Bel), Tim Wellens (Bel).

***CW* says**
Greipel will land his obligatory bunch sprint win, while Tony Gallopin and Tim Wellens will animate the non-sprinter stages.

The kit
Ridley bikes, Campagnolo components.

The boss
Marc Sergeant.

ROLLING STAGE

Stage 16 Bourg-de-Péage > Gap

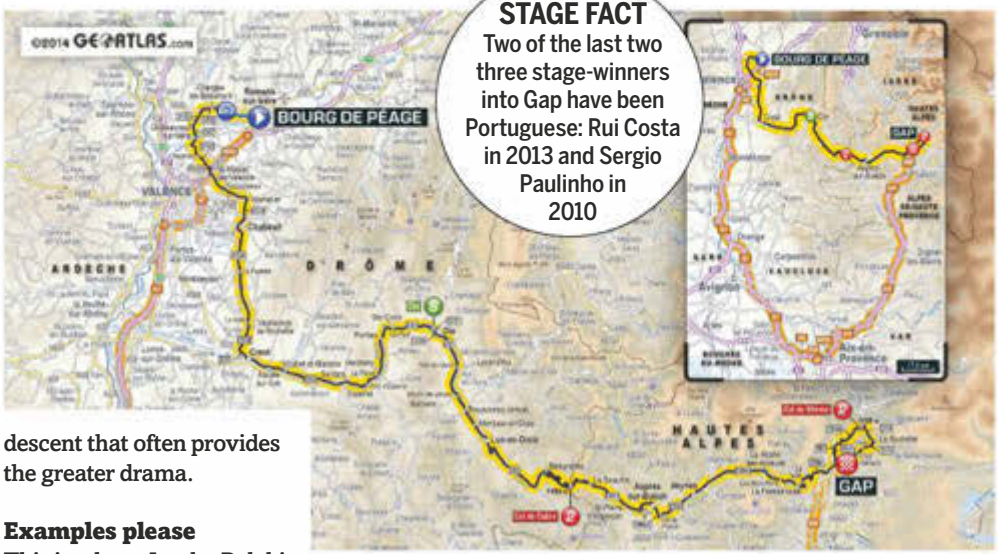
201km | **Monday July 20** | Start 12:25 – Finish 17:20 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



3/5 1/5 2/5



STAGE FACT
Two of the last two three stage-winners into Gap have been Portuguese: Rui Costa in 2013 and Sergio Paulinho in 2010

Although it rarely hosts a full-blown mountain stage, Gap is frequently the Tour's gateway into or out of the Alps, and it rarely disappoints. A town of 40,000 surrounded by dusty mountains, it welcomes Tour chaos with bumper-to-bumper traffic, chockablock hotels and highly memorable racing.

The Tour's Poggio
It's invariably the Col de Manse, outside of town that provides the drama. A second-category ascent that summits at 1,268m 12km from the finish, it solicits attacks like a punch-bag. These may catch the more lackadaisical GC contenders on the back foot, but it's the descent that often provides the greater drama.

Examples please
This is where Joseba Beloki broke his leg in 2003 and sent Lance Armstrong cyclo-crossing across a meadow. In 2011, the Brothers Schleck inevitably lost time in the wet here, while Chris Froome and Alberto Contador had a 'whoops' moment going great guns down it in 2013.

What will happen?
If history's taught us anything, it's that the win in Gap will come from a break that gains a hefty margin on the GC men early on. It's the second-longest stage of the Tour, gradually gaining altitude as it heads south-east with the second-cat Col de Cabre the only other climb on the way.

PROFILE



Movistar
(Spain)



2015 form
Alejandro Valverde continued to try and prove the haters wrong by winning Liège and Flèche, Benat Intxausti and Giovanni Visconti won a stage and the KoM jersey at the Giro, Nairo Quintana won Tirreno and Alex Dowsett won Bayern Rundfahrt.

Modus operandi
Few can boast as prestigious a Tour record than Movistar, whose history dates back to Miguel Indurain's wins, as well as Oscar Pereiro's sort-of win. They rallied round Valverde, though the penny seems to have dropped that he is not good enough to win.

Look out for
Quintana goes in as leader, having proven his credentials by winning last year's Giro. The Colombian looks like his generation's best climber, so expect fireworks.

The others from...
Jonathan Castroviejo (Esp), Alex Dowsett (GBr), Imanol Erviti (Esp), John Gadret (Fra), Jose Herrada (Esp), Gorka Izagirre (Esp), Jon Izagirre (Esp), Adriano Malori (Ita), José Joaquin Rojas (Esp), Alejandro Valverde (Esp)

***CW* says**
The youngest of the favourites, this year's Tour may come too early in Quintana's career to win. A podium finish at best.

The kit
Canyon bikes, Campag components.

The boss
Eusebio Unzue.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 17 Digne-les-Bains > Pra Loup

161km | **Wednesday July 22** | Start 12:45 – Finish 16:50 CET

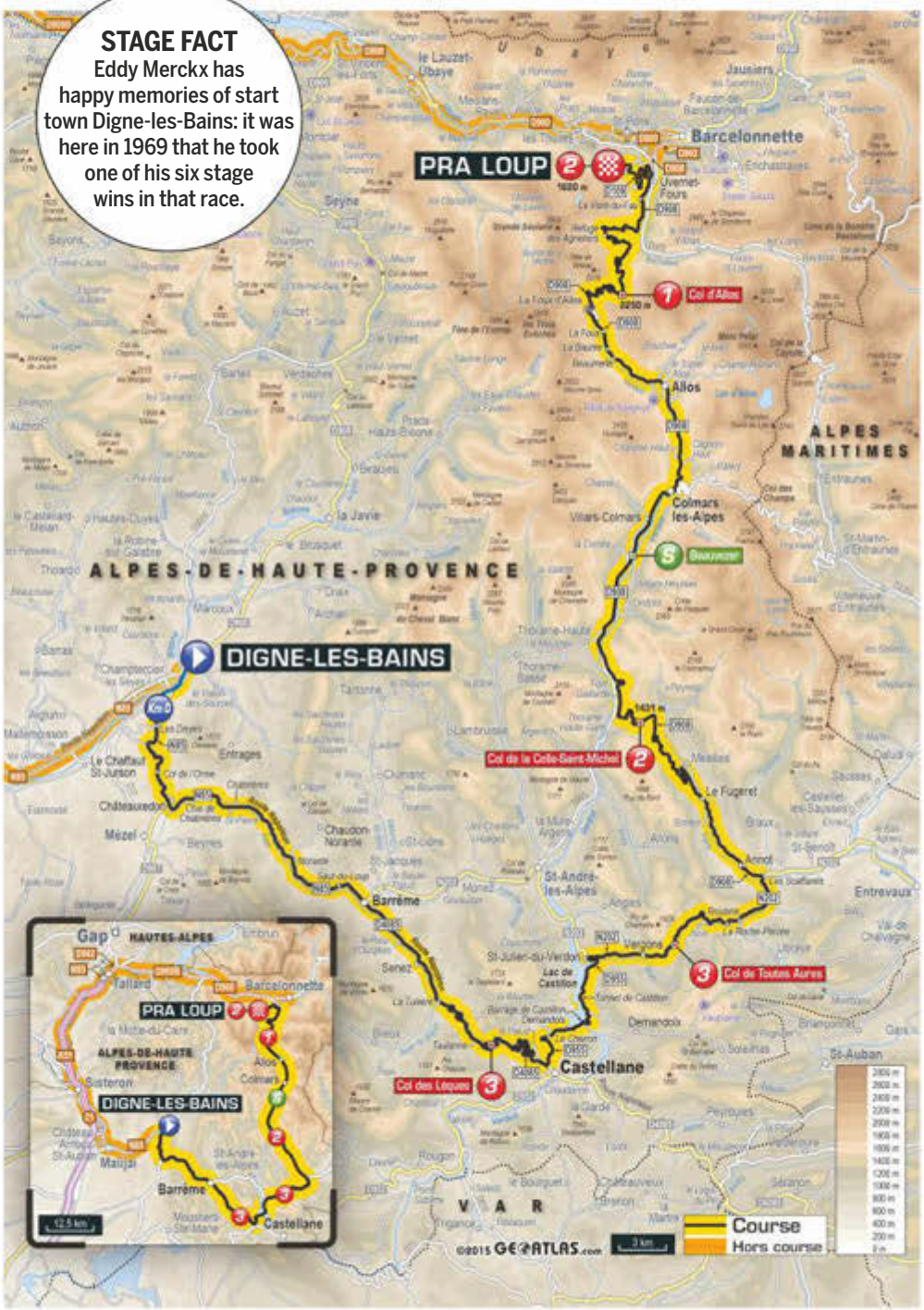


IMPACT ON THE RACE



4/5 1/5 4/5

STAGE FACT
Eddy Merckx has happy memories of start town Digne-les-Bains: it was here in 1969 that he took one of his six stage wins in that race.



This is it: fresh from a rest day, the final push and four arduous days in the Alps start here. Regardless of how things have gone so far, there'll be nowhere to hide for the race leader. The stages ahead are generally short, designed to encourage aggressive racing.

So what's in store?
Excitement. It's a lumpy stage that will could tempt some of the KOM contenders into the break but the GC battle will ignite on the penultimate climb, the 23km Col d'Allos. Those GC hopefuls needing to reduce their deficit could attack on the final two climbs, but the Pra Loup summit finish is probably not long enough to produce big gaps.

Didn't the Dauphiné do this stage?
It did indeed. Romain Bardet took full advantage of the fast 16km descent off the Allos, opening up a time gap of over a minute before he began the final climb, which he crossed first to win by 36 seconds from Tejay van Garderen. Mimicking Bardet's fearless descending might be the blueprint to stage success, but with precipitous verges, there's no room for error.

Any other history?
It's not lost on anniversary-loving race director Christian Prudhomme that it was at Pra Loup, 40 years ago, that the downfall of the great Eddy Merckx began. Reeling from a punch to the kidneys by a spectator a couple of days earlier, the Belgian lost two minutes to Bernard Thévenet, who took over the lead and went on to win the whole Tour. What was that we said about time differences?

Photo: Graham Watson



Today is the start of something big

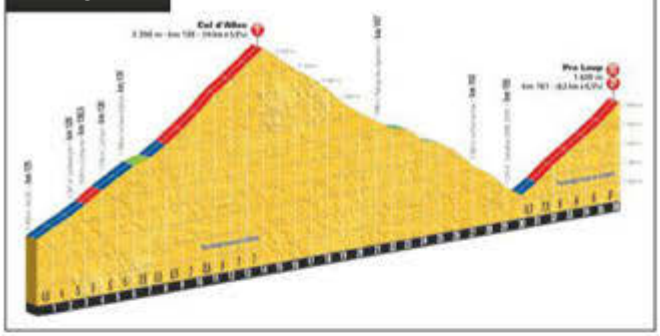
PROFILE



TIME SCHEDULE

Place	from the finish	from the start	ETA (CET)
Digne-les-Bains (Start)	161km	0km	12.55
Col des Lèques (Cat 3)	121km	40km	13.52
Col de Toutes Aures (Cat 3)	94km	67km	14.31
Col de la Colle-Saint-Michel (Cat 2)	65km	96km	15.21
Beauvezer (Sprint)	50km	111km	15.39
Allos	38km	123km	15.53
Col d'Allos (Cat 1)	22km	139km	16.34
Pra Loup (Cat 2. Finish)	0km	161km	17.04

KEY CLIMB



MTN-Qhubeka
(South Africa)



2015 form
Having signed a bunch of sprinters who finish between third and fifth a lot, they have finished between second and fifth a lot. They have reached the top spot of the podium in stage races, though, with Louis Meintjes winning the Coppi e Bartali and Youcef Reguigui the Tour of Langkawi.

Modus operandi
If just one of Edvald Boasson Hagen, Tyler Farrar or Matt Goss had rediscovered their past speed, MTN would have an obvious leader to support in the bunch sprints. But as that hasn't happened yet, MTN would do well to plant them in craftily selected breaks.

Look out for
Boasson Hagen's form has improved lately, breaking a near two-year duck with a win in the Tour des Fjords. He may still look a shadow of the rider who took two stage victories in 2011, but he's capable of working his way into race-winning situations.

The others from...
Steve Cummings (GBr), Tyler Farrar (USA), Matt Goss (Aus), Gerald Ciolek (Ger), Jacques Janse Van Rensburg (RSA), Merhawi Kudus (Eri), Louis Meintjes (RSA), Serge Pauwels (Bel), Daniel Teklehaimanot (Eri)

***CW* says**
Steve Cummings is eyeing the yellow jersey in the first week. He's a strong time triallist and shouldn't lose too much time up the Mur de Huy.

The kit
Cervélo bikes, Rotor components.

The boss
Brian Smith.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 18 Gap > Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne

186.5km | **Thursday July 23** | Start 12:10 – Finish 17:20 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



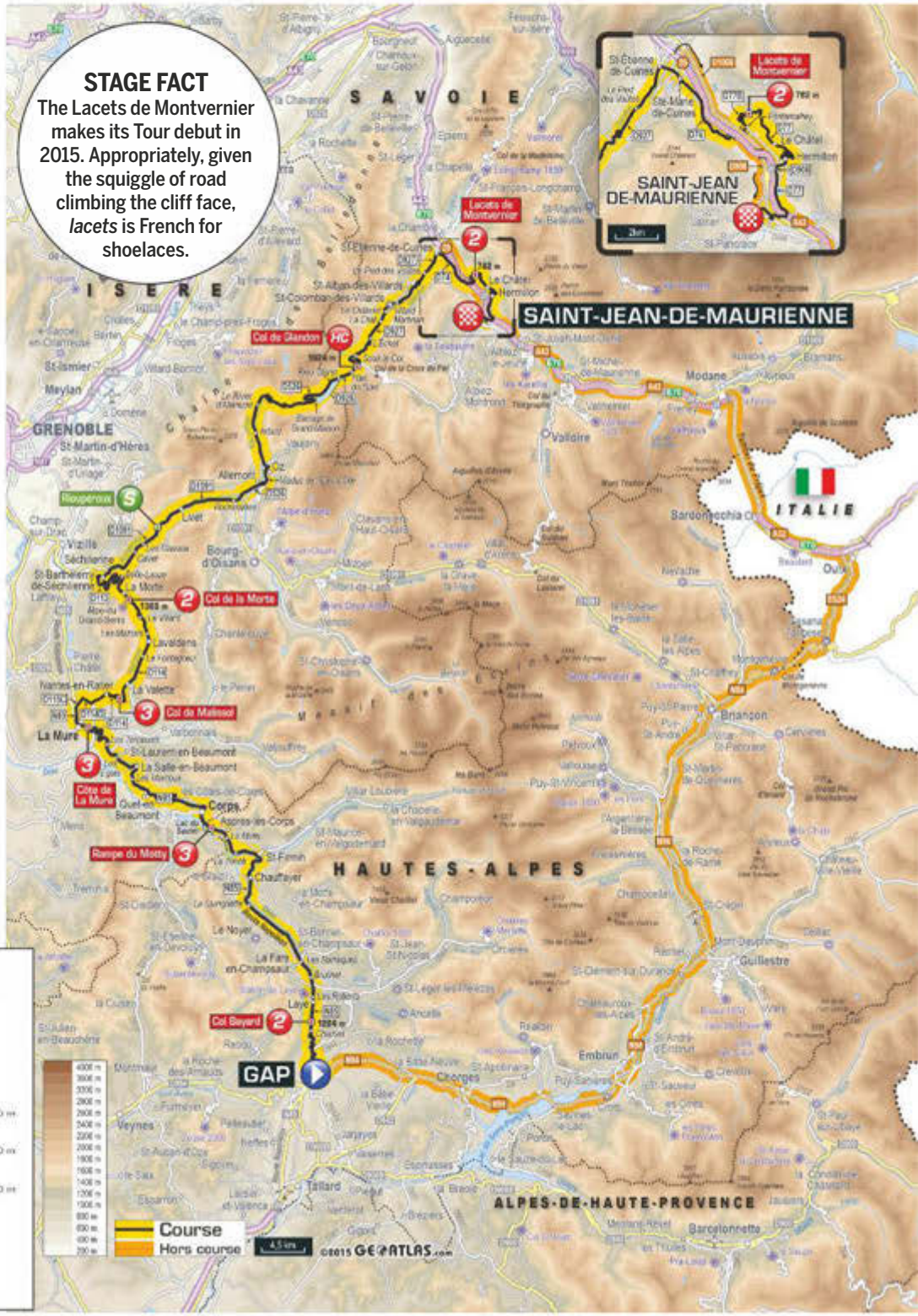
The riders will be warming up on the rollers on the morning of the longest alpine stage of the race. The peloton heads straight uphill out of Gap on the Col Bayard before a relentless succession of four more short, sharp ascents (including the wonderfully named Rampe du Motty, the Côte de la Mure, the Col du Malissol and the Col de la Morte) and the Col du Glandon, a fearsome 21km-long monster. The final climb is the Lacets de Montvernier, coming 10km from the finish.

Hard day's height

Any teams looking to take control early on could find themselves short on numbers towards the sharp end of the day. The Glandon ought to provide a stern test and it will be a shredded peloton that will contest the slopes of the Lacets de Montvernier,

STAGE FACT

The Lacets de Montvernier makes its Tour debut in 2015. Appropriately, given the squiggle of road climbing the cliff face, *lacets* is French for shoelaces.



KEY CLIMB

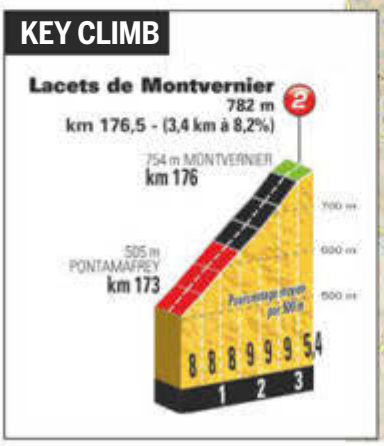


Photo: Graham Watson

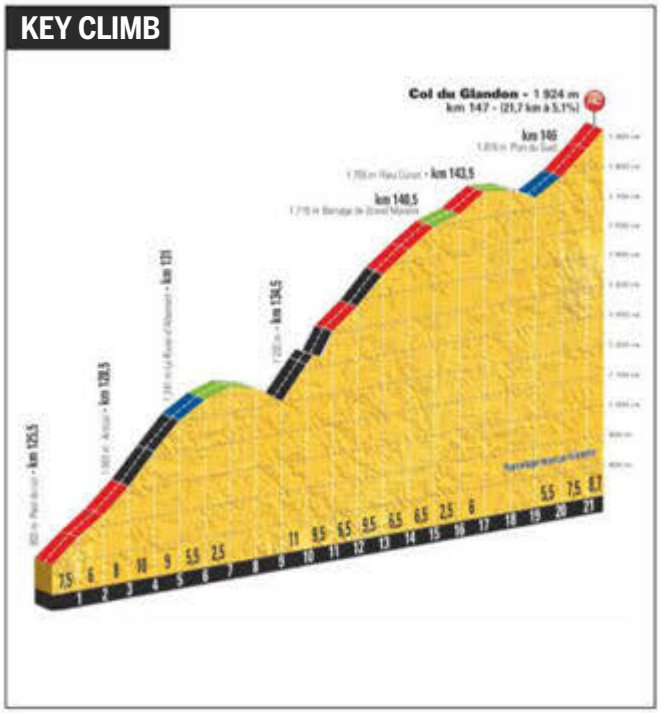

Montvernier's hairpin bends

a spectacular series of 18 hairpins in just over 3km. There could be several narratives: the fight for the stage win, the fight between GC rivals, and the fight just to make it to the finish in time. The gruppetto is going to have a long day in the saddle.

Bottleneck

The pivotal point of the day will come on the Lacets de Montvernier. Neither particularly long (3.4km) nor steep (eight per cent), the difficulty of this jaw-dropping sliver of tarmac is its narrow width and probable high speeds. It's the perfect ambush point, and a mechanical or puncture here could be catastrophic since team cars will be way back.

KEY CLIMB



PROFILE



TIME SCHEDULE

Place	From the finish	From the start	ETA (CET)
Gap (Start)	186.5km	0km	12.20
Col Bayard (Cat 2)	180km	6.5km	12.36
Rampe du Motty (Cat 3)	151km	35.5km	13.16
Côte de la Mure (Cat 3)	126km	60.5km	13.53
Col de Malissol (Cat 3)	116km	70.5km	14.09
Col de la Morte (Cat 2)	101.5km	85km	14.32
Rioupéroux (Sprint)	79km	107.5km	15.00
Col du Glandon (HC)	39.5km	147km	16.27
Lacets de Montvernier (Cat 2)	10km	176.5km	17.08
Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne (Finish)	0km	186.5km	17.20

Orica GreenEdge

(Australia)



2015 form

The Aussie squad were on fire at the start of the Giro, winning the opening team time trial and a stage with Michael Matthews, and keeping the pink jersey for the first four days. Michael Albasini won a couple of Tour of Romandy stages, and Simon Yates continued his auspicious development with top sixes in the Basque Country, Romandy and the Dauphiné.

Modus operandi

Like a pop act that opens with all their hits and are left with album tracks by the end, Orica are first week specialists. They'll be targeting stage three's Mur de Huy finish with Gerrans, stage six's uphill sprint with Matthews, and stage nine's TTT.

Look out for

The annoyingly nicknamed 'Bling' Matthews has won stages in all four Grand Tours he's entered, but this will be his first Tour. He'll target stages too tough for pure sprinters, where he'll come up against stiffer competition than usual.

The others from...

Michael Albasini (Sui), Luke Durbridge (Aus), Simon Gerrans (Aus), Mathew Heyman (Aus), Jens Keukeleire (Bel), Christian Meier (Can), Svein Tuft (Can), Adam Yates (GBr), Simon Yates (GBr).

***CW* says**

A repeat of 2013's dream opening week looks beyond them and Yates is too young to challenge for the GC, but they could snag a stage.

The kit

Scott bikes, Shimano components.

The boss

Shayne Bannan.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 19 Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne > La Toussuire

138km | **Friday July 24** | Start 13:20 – Finish 17:45 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



5/5 1/5 5/5

Today is all about the big guns slugging it out up big mountains. And we assume no one will be telling Chris Froome to slow down when he hits the final climb of La Toussuire this time round. It was here in 2012 that he put his own race-leading team-mate Bradley Wiggins on the back foot and created a tension between the two that never really got settled. Pierre Rolland won the stage.

STAGE FACT
Start town St-Jean-de-Maurienne is home to the iconic Opinel knife — an item that's become emblematic of French culture.

Memories, eh?
Floyd Landis will also have painful recollections from the ski resort. The disgraced American blew up big time here in 2006 to lose his yellow jersey. He doped his way back to a most improbable recovery the following day but was caught shortly afterwards.

What other climbs are there today?
The stage opens with an up from kilometre zero. The Col du Chaussy is new on the Tour itinerary, although the lower slopes also provide the run-in for the previous day's stage. You've then got the Col de la Croix de



Fer (which incorporates the Col du Glandon) — a hors catégorie Tour staple — and the Col du Mollard on the way down from it just for kicks. The Mollard's ascent is only five kilometres but the switchbacked wooded descent is a little treat.

Any other business?
There's so much good climbing packed into this small area, this short stage has to do an out-and-back loop up and down the valley just to find somewhere flat enough to stick the intermediate sprint.

TIME SCHEDULE

Place	from the finish	from the start	ETA (CET)
Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne (Start)	138km	0km	13.25
Col du Chaussy (Cat 1)	122.5km	15.5km	14.07
Epierre (Sprint)	96km	42km	14.40
Saint-Sulpice	82.5km	55.5km	14.57
Col de la Croix de Fer (HC)	55km	83km	16.07
Col du Mollard (Cat 2)	35km	103km	16.38
Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne	19km	119km	16.55
La Toussuire (Cat 1. Finish)	0km	138km	17.45

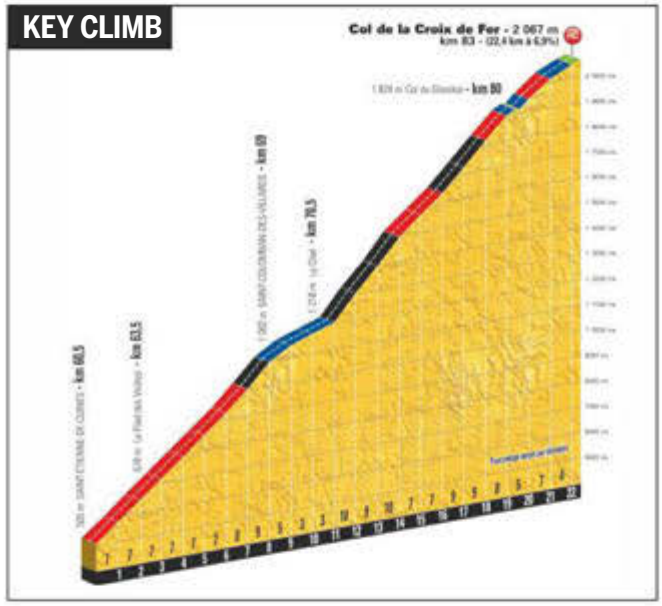
PROFILE



KEY CLIMB



KEY CLIMB



Sky
(Great Britain)



2015 form
As ever they've been the dominant force in stage races — Chris Froome won the Dauphiné and Richie Porte the hat-trick of Paris-Nice, Volta a Catalunya and Giro del Trentino. The Giro was more of a mixed bag, with Porte abandoning but Elia Viviani and Vasil Kiryienka winning stages — as were the Classics, where Ian Stannard and Geraint Thomas won Het Nieuwsblad and E3-Harelbeke respectively, but none of the Monuments.

Modus operandi
If Team Sky was a person, they would wake up every day at the crack of dawn, work overtime, and be in bed by nine. Such a lifestyle may sound regimented and dull, but it gets results.

Look out for
The team is united behind Chris Froome's bid for a second yellow jersey. The competition is stiffer than it was two years ago, but overall victory at the Dauphiné makes him the in-form rider to watch.

The others from...
Ian Boswell (USA), Bernhard Eisel (Aut), Sergio Henao (Col), Peter Kennaugh (GBr), David Lopez (Esp), Mikel Nieve (Esp), Wouter Poels (Ned), Richie Porte (Aus), Nicolas Roche (Irl), Ian Stannard (GBr), Geraint Thomas (GBr)

***CW* says**
If he survives the treacherous first week this time, the smart money is on Froome to win yellow.

The kit
Pinarello bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Dave Brailsford.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

Stage 20 Modane Valfréjus > Alpe d'Huez

110.5km | **Saturday July 25** | Start 13:15 – Finish 16:32 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



Do you remember the stage in 2011 when Alberto Contador attacked almost from the gun, the race blew to bits on the first climb and Pierre Rolland broke away to win? Well, this stage is identical — a lively blast of 110km that does away with any preamble and smacks the bunch up with a triple whammy of Alpine icons.

Same again then please

Maybe, maybe not. With less than two weeks to go before the Tour's start it looked like the Col du Galibier — the highest climb of the race — would be taken off the parcours following a landslide this April. If the stage is rerouted it's likely to go over the Col de la Croix de Fer before the ascent from Bourg d'Oisans up the infamous 21 hairpins of Alpe d'Huez, arena of some of the Tour's most famous moments.

What makes Alpe d'Huez so special?

First introduced in 1952, the Tour has come back here on 26 other occasions since. At the top it's just another Alpine ski resort but the fans flock here in their droves, especially the Dutch, who've colonised a corner. Fausto Coppi won on the Tour's first visit here, while in 1986 it was where team-mates Bernard Hinault and Greg LeMond buried the hatchet. On the last visit, Chris Froome bonked and was given a 20-second time penalty for taking an illegal feed.

What will happen?

It's the unpredictability of short stages which makes them so alluring. The race will likely go off like a box of fireworks on the first climb and from there anything can happen. This is the last mountain stage so riders can afford to lay it all on the line. The autobus will be aware that the short distance makes for an unforgiving time cut off for such an aggressive stage.

TIME SCHEDULE

Place	From the finish	From the start	ETA (CET)
Modane (Start)	110.5km	0km	13.15
Saint-Martin-d'Arc	96km	14.5km	13.33
Col du Télégraphe (Cat 1)	84.5km	26km	14.05
Valloire	80km	30.5km	14.10
Col du Galibier (HC)	61.5km	49km	15.01
La Grave	42.5km	68km	15.21
Bourg-d'Oisans (Sprint)	15km	95.5km	15.50
Alpe d'Huez (HC Finish)	0km	110.5km	16.32

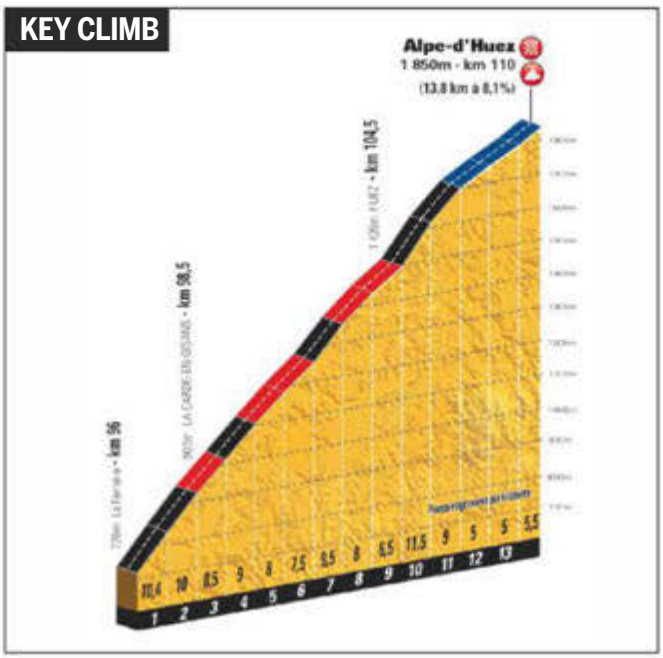
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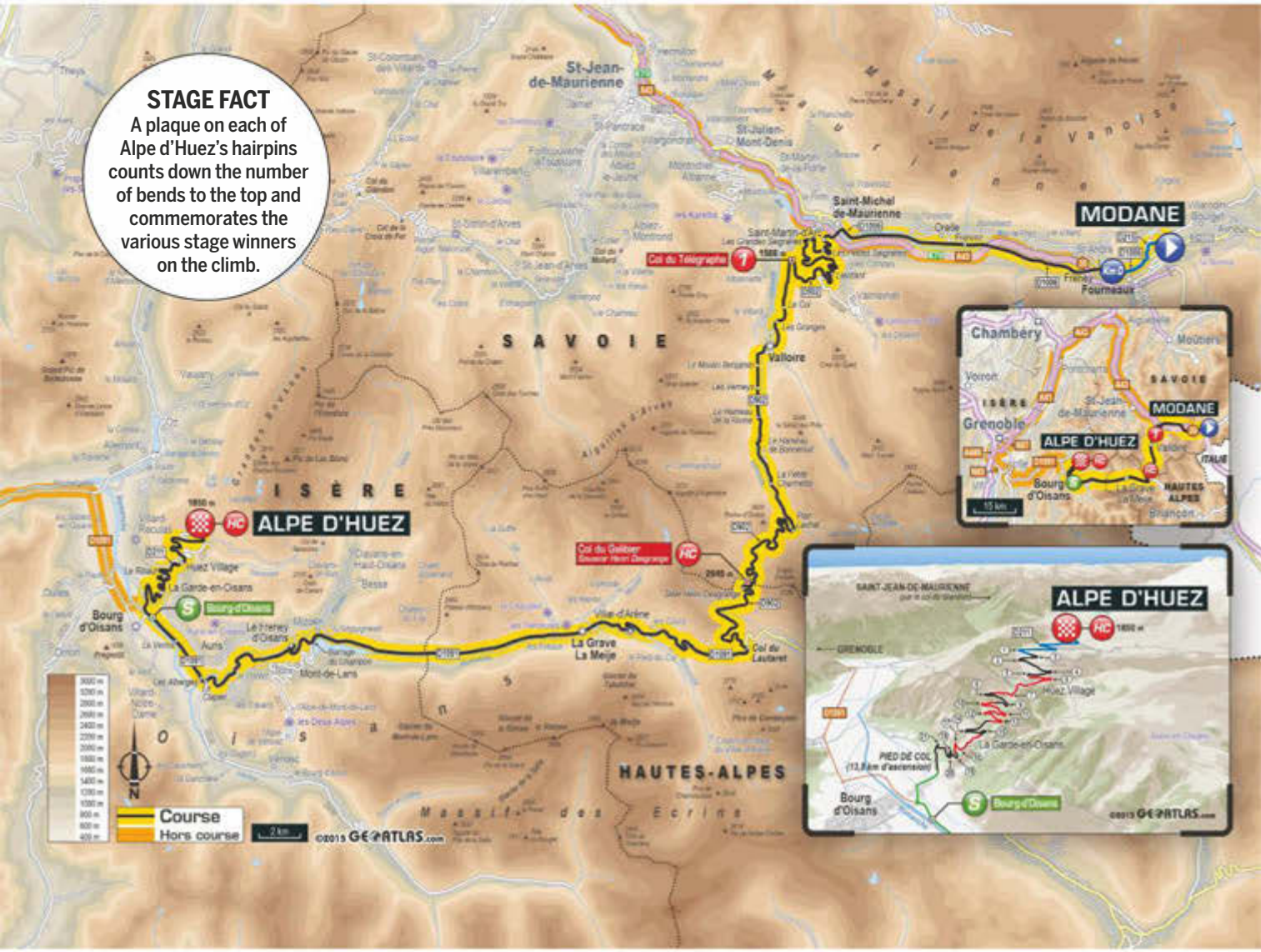


KEY CLIMB



KEY CLIMB





Tinkoff-Saxo

(Russia)



2015 form
Tinkoff-Saxo have achieved a miserly two WorldTour wins this season — but who cares when one of those was the Giro d'Italia overall? Contador's pink jersey triumph is easily their season highlight, but Peter Sagan's overall victory at the Tour of California was the most surprising result.

Modus operandi
You don't become a billionaire by being content with what you've got, and Russian moneybags Oleg Tinkov signalled his intent to push for more than just a yellow jersey with Contador, when he signed defending green jersey champion Sagan.

Look out for
Contador is set to be unleashed again on the GC, having spent the month not racing following his Giro win. Most of Tinkoff's resources will go towards protecting him. On the green jersey front Sagan is capable of looking after himself.

The others from...
Daniele Bennati (Ita), Maciej Bodnar (Pol), Jesus Hernandez (Esp), Robert Kiserlovski (Cro), Roman Kreuziger (Cze), Rafal Majka (Pol), Sergio Paulinho (Por), Michael Rodgers (Aus), Chris Anker Sorensen (Den).

***CW* says**
The Giro-Tour double will be a bridge too far for Contador and he'll have to settle for a podium finish at best. Sagan's showing in California suggests he's still favourite for the green jersey.

The kit
Specialized bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Stefano Feltrin

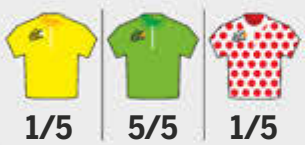
Stage 21 Sèvres > Paris Champs-Elysées

SPRINT STAGE

109.5km | **Sunday July 26** | Start 16:15 – Finish 19:04 CET



IMPACT ON THE RACE



This is the annual finale into central Paris, a procession followed by eight high-speed laps up and down the cobbles of the Champs Élysées.

STAGE FACT
The Tour used to do a dead turn at the top of the Champs-Elysées but moved to circling the Arc de Triomphe in celebration of the Tour's 100th edition in 2013.

Countless chancers will briefly entertain the idea of outfoxing the sprinters one last time. The last time that actually happened was 2005, when Alexandre Vinokourov gave the bunch the slip.

Look out for...
The yellow jersey riding alongside the race director's car drinking champagne; the smallest rider in the race riding the biggest guy's bike and vice versa. The early miles of the final stage always come with a 'last day of term' feel.

Does this stage matter?
Formulaic it may be, but the Tour de France isn't over until you've crossed the finish line. Accidents can happen, and no one is officially bound by the gentleman's truce between GC riders. As for the sprinters, winning on France's grandest avenue — save maybe for the World Championships — is pretty much the biggest prize going. Sometimes it's where the final throes of the green jersey race are played out, with dramatic last-gasp sprints.

Memorable moments
No one who watched it will forget the time Greg LeMond overturned Laurent Fignon's 50-second advantage to win the 1989 Tour. That was the one and only time the Champs-Elysées hosted a time trial finish to the race. Two years later, Djamolodine Abdujaparov suffered a horrific crash when he ploughed into the barriers during the bunch sprint. He was only just about able to limp his way over the line to claim the green jersey.



PROFILE



Trek Factory Racing (USA)



2015 form
Only occasionally has the team risen above anonymity since Fabian Cancellara fractured his vertebrae in March, with Giacomo Nizzolo winning the points jersey at the Giro, Bauke Mollema finishing second at Tirreno-Adriatico and Fabio Felline claiming a few high-profile stage wins.

Modus operandi
Like a balding middle-aged man still attending nightclubs every weekend, Trek Factory Racing continue to cling to past successes, deluding themselves that the likes of Haimar Zubeldia (38) and Fränk Schleck (35) have still got it, when instead a fresh, new identity for the team is long overdue.

Look out for
Cancellara tends to pick and choose his races these days so may not ride the Tour, but is a good shout for the opening time trial or the cobbled stage if he does. If he doesn't, the onus will be on new signing Bauke Mollema to ride a good GC.

The others from...
Julian Arredondo (Col), Matthew Busche (USA), Stijn Devolder (Bel), Markel Irizar (Esp), Gregory Rast (Sui), Fränk Schleck (Lux), Jasper Stuyven (Bel), Danny Van Poppel (Ned), Haimar Zubeldia (Esp).

***CW* says**
Mollema probably won't improve upon his sixth place finish two years ago, but a pursuit of stage wins and jerseys could prove fruitful.

The kit
Trek bikes, Shimano components.

The boss
Luca Guercilena.


SPORTIVE SERIES
Cycling
Suffolk Spinner
Ready for a spin?
SUNDAY JULY 19
OTLEY COLLEGE, SUFFOLK
PowerBar
cyclopian
SHIMANO
FULL ROUTE DETAILS & SIGN UP AT
BOOKMYRIDE.CO.UK

Do female pros use women-specific bikes?

CW set out to find what, beyond the marketing hype, women of the peloton really think of machines designed with their gender in mind

Owen Rogers

Take a look at the bikes at the start of a women's pro race and you might be surprised how few women's models there are. Despite the presence of the major manufacturers, it seems world-class riders do not need the geometric changes apparently required by normal women.

The Rabobank-Liv team of world champion Pauline Ferrand-Prévot, and Liv-Plantur, sister outfit of Giant-Alpecin, are both vehicles for publicising the Giant female-only brand, Liv. However, a close look at their bikes reveals all is not what it seems.

Cycling Weekly has learnt that both teams currently use the Giant Propel, a standard frame adorned with Liv Envie paintwork and decals. Both frames are remarkably similar in appearance, with tiny differences in geometry, the Liv being slightly more relaxed with a higher standover. However, these differences are clearly significant enough to affect some of the world's top-ranked riders.

Though no one from either team would comment, we asked other pro female riders to shed light on the reasoning behind their choices.

Different strokes

Cervélo — who do not make a women-specific model — sponsors two women's teams, supplying both S3 and S5 models. Ashleigh Moolman-Pasio rides one for Bigla Pro Cycling. "I don't want a women-specific bike, especially as we are high performance athletes," she told *CW*. "When you're lean and mean and ready to race, sometimes our bodies are similar to that of a man. We race just as hard as the men and how aggressive you can be on a bike is very much dependent on your own body biomechanics and general flexibility. That applies as much to men as to women."



Team Boels-Dolmans ride the women-specific Amira

However, Moolman-Pasio's engineering degree adds extra insight: "You can't just design a bike around a size 54 and then downscale. A bike that's been designed for a 75kg man on a 54cm frame downscaled to fit a woman doesn't work, it just makes it even stiffer."

If you want to see women-specific bikes in top races, head for Boels-Dolmans. The Dutch team, for which 2012 Olympic medallist Lizzie Armitstead rides, are in their second year riding Specialized, and the American firm has now focused its sponsorship solely on the team. It has addressed the downsizing issue throughout its range.

Yes



Lizzie Armitstead

Boels-Dolmans

"The Amira is easier to handle because the top tube is shorter so you are closer to the handlebars, which for women is often a problem. We have a Specialized bike-fit, where they set us up properly. Specialized also has women's clothing and specific shoes. Normally when you get women-specific stuff there is a compromise in terms of performance because they tailor it more towards the leisure rider — Specialized is high-end."

No



Iris Slappendel

Bigla Pro Cycling

"In my opinion women are just as diverse as men. My body is completely different from [team-mate] Annemiek van Vleuten's body, just as Bradley Wiggins is different from Mark Cavendish. I think if you can make a good frame you can make a good bike for anyone. The contact points are the most important. Also, professional riders are different from normal consumers who might want a bit more comfort."



The team ride the Amira, unashamedly marketed as a women's race bike. As the only women-specific frame routinely ridden in the pro peloton, this bike walks the walk. Despite not fitting the female stereotype of long legs and a short body, Armitstead believes in the concept. "It's the first women-specific bike I have ever ridden, and the nicest bike I've ridden," she told us.

The perfect perch

The Specialized deal comes complete with handlebars and, more importantly, saddles, the American company manufacturing a range of specific perches. "I rode the first part of my career on the wrong saddle," Armitstead continued. "I had a lot of problems and it was only since trying the Specialized saddle that I've been comfortable."

Every woman we have spoken to agrees that the saddle is the most important component. "It's crucial if you want to ride every day," Orica-AIS's Gracie Elvin told us.

Back at Liv-Plantur, the various saddles on show are all from team sponsor Pro. Other teams take a different approach. Some do not even have a saddle sponsor, allowing riders to pick their own. Then there are those sponsored teams whose riders use other saddles, an approach which proves the saddle may well be more important than the frame for female professionals.

OUR TAKE

It doesn't matter whether they're male or female, pro racers want a low-profile, aggressive position on the bike. Bike geometry that is ideal for racing is not gender-specific and a pro would always favour an aggressive position over a fit that is generally tailored to their sex.

Female-specific bikes are tailored towards the retail market, which is why many female pros don't use them. They are able to get the position they want from standard bike geometry adapted with finishing kit that suits them best.

HOT STUFF

Wiggins Replica Jersey

Wiggins's Hour Record triumph was a great boost for brand Wiggo and we've seen many jerseys with the target logo out on the road, while Rapha's website shows them as being sold out. We'll see how it performs on summer rides and if it makes us ride that little bit faster.



www.rapha.cc
£75
Test report: August

Castelli travel bag

If Castelli is your brand of choice then you'll be happy to know that it has launched a complete bag set including Rolling Travel bag (seen here), Travel bag, duffle bag, backpack, rain bag and two saddlebags. Buying all of them may be Castelli overload, and will also set you back a few quid too.



www.saddleback.co.uk
£200
Test report: August

Elite Corsa bottle

This is the most widely used bottle (and cage) brand in the pro peloton. The one we have here is Elite's biodegradable option, which also features a 'pop off' lid, just in case you do lose your bottle in the bunch.



www.madison.co.uk
£3.99
Test report: July

Bontrager Velocis shoes £169.99



You can spend a lot more than £169.99 on a pair of cycling shoes, but I'm not sure why you would when these brand new Bontrager shoes offer such a compelling package. These may only have a rating of 10 on Bontrager's 'stiffness index' (compared to the 14 of the high-end XXX Road shoes), but it's more than enough for racing at a good level, without any discomfort on longer rides.

Comfort is also improved by the level of adjustment offered by the Boa dial, which is easy to alter on the move, even with gloves. Ventilation could be improved, though that might not make them suitable if you're heading abroad to ride in hot conditions. *Henry Robertshaw*

237g, www.bontrager.com

9

Sportful Bodyfit Pro W Jersey £75

Yet another Sportful gem. Taking heavy design cues from the Tinkoff-Saxo race team, the Bodyfit Pro jersey aims to offer a race and performance fit, and it doesn't disappoint. The seamless shoulder panels use Sportful's AirMesh and provide a second skin, while further use of this fabric on the arms and side panels make for a very well-ventilated jersey, so probably one for the hotter days only. Silicone grippers hold the jersey secure at the waist and three rear pockets provide space for spares and nutrition. But with no zipped option, this is definitely a race-day number. *Hannah Bussey*



112g
www.c3products.com

9



Vee Road Runner tyres £37.99

The Road Runner is marketed as the Vee's summer road tyre, but what was most impressive was the tyre's puncture protection (always important on British roads even in the height of summer), and didn't suffer a single puncture during my time on the road runners. Grip was also pretty impressive, with fairly constant performance in both wet and dry conditions. However, if you're wanting to make the most of your summer form and put your mates to the sword, it might be worth looking for other brands, as rolling resistance could have been better. I wouldn't be choosing these tyres for racing seeing as a pair of Continental GP4000S are only £10 dearer. *Henry Robertshaw*

229g www.veetireco.co.uk

7



Bontrager Flare R Tail Light £44.99

Product of the week

This little light from Bontrager, which uses LEDs provided by Cree, has been a lifesaver over the last few weeks. Using the frame mount or clip provided means you can leave it attached to your bike without the need for a recharge, as it has a decent run time of 23 hours for the flash mode. Charging isn't a problem either, with it being complete in less than three hours via a USB port. The case does feel a little cheap, though it is waterproof, and I always knew I would be seen thanks to its bright 65-lumen output. *Symon Lewis*

58g www.bontrager.com

9



Polar V650 cycling computer £174.50

Although it is only compatible with Bluetooth sensors, not the ANT+ ones you most likely already have, the Polar V650 is a nice piece of kit. It's £75 cheaper than the Garmin Edge 510, and with a larger colour touchscreen that's probably also of higher quality, it's remarkably easy to use. The Smart Coaching feature is its highlight, perfect if you're doing structured training, neatly showing how much time you've spent in each heart rate zone. There are problems, notably the fact that it doesn't offer navigation and strangely won't record incline without a speed sensor attached.

Henry Robertshaw

119g www.polar.com

7

Taggisar ICE Stickers £4.99

Most of the time the only consequences of a crash are a spot of road rash and few scrapes on your frame. However, if the worst happens and there's a more serious accident, you might be grateful of Taggisar's ICE stickers. They attach to your bike or clothing, and include a QR code which contains a link to your medical information and next of kin contacts when scanned with a smartphone. For £4.99 you will get two stickers, so probably one for your bike and another for your helmet, with a five-pack available for an additional £4. The only snag is the Taggisar app, which could do with a bit more development, as it currently just sends you on to the brand's website.

Henry Robertshaw

2g www.taggisar.co.uk

8



Santini Smarter bibshorts £99.99

The black fabric in these shorts has a knitted look rather than the standard smooth Lycra. Santini vaunts its durability, but it is also airy, with Santini recommending the shorts for temperatures from 18 up to 35°C. The white fabric on the legs has a more usual Lycra texture and is quite thin, so should also help with temperature regulation.

The shorts are a bit let down by the leg grippers, which are quite narrow and slightly restrictive. The NAT seatpad is comfortable in hot weather and good for medium to high mileage. It is made of five layers, including a ventilated gel core with raised cylinders which Santini claims provides a massage while riding – not an effect which I could detect. *Paul Norman*

245g www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

7



LONG TERM TEST

28 months later

Morvélo KMP bibshorts £75

(now discontinued: equivalent product £90)

These bibshorts, a result of the relationship between Morvélo and Kinesis bikes, have proved durable. The pad is comfortable, if a bit chunky, and the relatively thick fabric means they're good for cooler days too. *Paul Norman*

www.morvelo.com

8


Morvélo bibs: hard-wearing

Can't live without

Electron Backupz lightset £14.99

It may be midsummer now but, come the autumn, this tiny light will find its place in my saddlepack again. It has one LED, runs off two CR2032 button cells, weighs next to nothing but is surprisingly bright. *Paul Norman*

www.madison.co.uk


Electron Backupz: small, light and bright

Look 675 Light £3,499

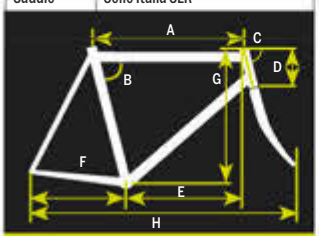
Tested by: Andrew Dilkes | Miles ridden: 350 | Size tested: Medium | Weight: 7.92kg/17.46lb

Having been around for a couple of years, the 675's divisive style still looks as fresh and innovative as the day it was launched. It now sits second in line to the Look throne, with the 795 and 695 slotting in above and, having been on a diet since we last saw it back in 2013, the 675 Light now boasts a sub-kilo chassis. We've given this bike another shake-down to see if still delivers.

Look 675 Light
£3,499

Frame	10/10
Specification	7/10
Ride	9/10
Value	7/10

Distributor	www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk
Frame	1.5k carbon
Fork	High modulus carbon (HMC)
Size range	XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL
Weight	8.2kg/18.0lb (7.73kg/17lb without pedals)
Groupset	Shimano Ultegra
Alterations	None
Gear ratios	11sp 11-28 cassette, 50/34 chainset
Wheels	Mavic Aksium
Tyres	Continental Ultra Sport
Bar	3T Ergonova Stealth Carbon
Stem	Look A-Stem
Seatpost	Look Carbon
Saddle	Selle Italia SLR



SIZE TESTED: M

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
53.7cm	73.8°	72.3°	15.7cm	37.6cm	41cm	55.2cm	98.8cm

Frame

Originally aimed at the endurance (read sportive) market, bringing the top tube up to meet the stem and merging them together does a good job at disguising the surprisingly high front end. This integrated 'A-Stem' also does away with a stack of spacers, making the front end stiffer than other bikes in this category.

This construction does mean that prospective owners need to be very sure of their sizing. Yes, the stem is flippable (available in either +/- 5° or 15° angles) and available in a variety of lengths (80mm to 130mm for the 5° angle, and 80mm to 120mm for the 15° angle). Personal preference is calculated using Look's virtual measurement tool, but the bespoke shape means you can't swap out for any old stem, should you want to make adjustments. Arguably, though, it's worth it for the 'pro' slammed front-end look that's achieved.



£3.5k is a weighty price for this 8.2kg machine

It's worth noting that even with its 100 per cent carbon forks, bottom bracket, head tube and dropouts — the 'Light' element is only in reference to its own breed. Look is also celebrating the use of 1.5k carbon in its manufacturing. At 8.2 kilograms, it's still pretty rotund but the total build is about a kilo lighter than the standard 675.

Specification

The frame's adornments add to the weight. Put aside the top-drawer 3T Ergonova Carbon bars, everything else is pretty workmanlike.

We suspect a large part of the heft is due to the Mavic Aksium wheels. Strong and robust they are, lightweight they are not.

Dressing them in Continental's Ultra Sport tyres also adds to the chub. Running Shimano's faultless Ultegra groupset throughout, it's still weightier than the brand-topping Dura-Ace found on bikes at a similar price point.





A-Stem: who needs spacers?



Ultegra brakes are unexceptional at this price



Neat, aero front end

Ride

Despite the load, the 675 is by no means sluggish, with only the steepest gradients revealing its true weight, barely noticeable while ripping along the flats.

The bike feels as urgent as you make it. Leaning on the gear out of corners or up small rises sees the bike roar forward eagerly. Even with its stiff front end, the 675 Light retains enough comfort to ensure you're not feeling brutalised by the end of a ride.

This stiffness makes for very precise and predictable handling. It was pushed hard but at no point did it feel 'on the limit'.

Value

However, not all in the garden is rosy. Despite the great ride, this is an expensive bike for the spec on offer. For 3.5 grand, I'd be expecting Shimano's flagship mechanical Dura-Ace groupset, Ultegra Di2, or a better-spec set of hoops.

For a frameset weighing south of 1kg, the completed build seems portly and out of place at this price point.

Verdict

Despite my complaints, the 675 Light is still an awesome chassis. It inspires confidence, and although I have to attribute some of that to the Continental's budget-end Ultra Sport tyres, I can't help think how railed it would ride given a lighter groupset, some Gucci wheels and faster-rolling rubber. But all of that costs money, and given the fact that you've already parted with the best part of £4k, justifying another two grand's worth of upgrades off the bat is going to be out of the question for most. However, like we always say, spend your money on the heart of the bike — that is, the frame.

Thus, if you're done with 'clone' bikes, and looking for an exceptional ride on which to add upgrades over time, the 695 Light would be a fair bet.

8

For

- Brilliant ride
- Pro credentials
- Niche (you won't see many)
- Comfortable

Against

- Expensive
- Heavy
- Low specification

Summer base layers

Designed to keep you cool in the saddle, summer base layers come into their own as the weather heats up

Paul Norman

What

A summer base layer is worn under your jersey to ensure efficient cooling in hot conditions. It needs to be light to be cool, and will be made of technical fabric that wicks moisture away from the skin. Many are made of mesh that allows air to flow through.

Why?

A good-quality base layer is important to ensure that you remain comfortable in warmer conditions and to act as a second skin if you crash. Most brands have at least one in their range, but materials range in type from the 'string vest' to thicker weaves. We wanted to see which was more comfortable and effective once the temperature rises.

How?

With the weather not yet quite up to 'scorching' on *Cycling Weekly*'s thermometer, we took to the turbo to work up a sweat. We also went for a ride to check the fit, particularly rear coverage, when cycling, and whether the fabric was comfortable when worn for extended periods under a summer jersey.

HOW WE SCORE

10 - Superb, best in its class and we couldn't fault it.
9 - Excellent, a slight change and it would be perfect
8 - Brilliant, we'd happily buy it
7 - Solid, but there's better out there
6 - Pretty good, but not quite hitting the mark
5 - OK, nothing wrong with it, but nothing special
4 - A few niggles let this down
3 - Disappointing
2 - Poor, approach with caution
1 - Terrible, do not buy this product

Assos NS.skinFoil Summer_evo7 £59.99

The Skinfoil is a circular-knitted, seamless garment with plenty of ventilation and ribbing across the front, back and sides to ensure a close fit. The fabric is soft, and the holes in the mesh are relatively small. There's just one seam, across the shoulders, though it's not flat-locked.

Weight 79 grams

Assos produces four different weights of base layer for different seasons, and although this summer one is the lightest in the range, it is the second heaviest on test, at 79g — although this hardly makes it a heavyweight. It was comfortable and did not get appreciably damp during efforts. Tail coverage and general fit is good, helped by the stretch from the ribbing. Because the mesh is quite closed, this base layer felt warmer than some of the others on test; its wicking performance was not much better than that of far cheaper alternatives. If you value the kudos of flashing an 'A' when you unzip your jersey, this may be the base layer for you.

7

Colours: white
Size tested: 1 (equivalent to medium)
www.yellow-limited.com



Odlo Evolution Light Trend £35

Founded by a Norwegian and based in Switzerland, Odlo knows a thing or two about cold weather base layers. More recently, it has extended that expertise to technical cycle clothing and summer base layers, with an extensive range of singlet and sleeved styles.

Odlo's Evolution Light Trend base layer is the least holey on test, but nevertheless doesn't get too hot and wicks sweat away easily, never feeling damp, even on longer climbs. It is very comfortable, being made of soft, stretchy fabric and is seamless. Since it's long, back coverage is good and it is a close fit without being constrictive. There's silver woven into the fabric to keep pongs at bay.

Weight 86 grams

The patterns woven into the fabric are cosmetic rather than functional. If you don't think this is useful on an undergarment, there's an un-patterned version available too. Odlo makes an X-light version, which has a more open weave and might be better for really hot days, but this is a comfortable choice for typical UK summer temperatures.

8

Colours: light blue, grey
Size tested: small
www.odlo.com



Castelli Core Mesh Sleeveless £35

Thirty-five quid doesn't buy you much these days, does it? For about the same price as a train fare from London to Birmingham (or from Castelli's HQ in Feltre to Milan), you get what looks like a string vest.

Thankfully Castelli's string vest (sorry, Core Mesh Sleeveless base layer), paired with a tight-fitting aero jersey, did an excellent job of keeping the jersey away from my skin, and maintained a layer of cool air in between. The base layer performed impressively when sweating heavily, never becoming waterlogged or sticky, even when I was dripping with sweat in the middle of a tough turbo session or on a long climb. The fit was also excellent, with the cut being the perfect length to tuck into the back of shorts — not so short that it comes out when riding and not so long that there's excess material to try and stuff away.

Weight 32 grams

However, with a S/M providing a close fit for my slender 6ft frame and no smaller sizes available, more diminutive riders may struggle to find exactly the right size.

9

Colours: white
Size tested: S/M
www.saddleback.co.uk

Craft Cool Mesh Superlight £28

Craft, based in Sweden, is another company that originally specialised in cold weather wear. It has branched out into summer-suitable base layers and kit. The base layer is very light with a quite large-holed mesh construction — although the 'holes' are actually thinner parts of the fabric. It is soft and comfortable to wear.

Weight 51 grams

Craft uses a 'hexachannel' fabric, which has grooves in the fibre's surface to assist with moisture transfer. Craft claims that this helps wick moisture away from the body so that it can evaporate from the fabric's outer surface. The technology seemed to work. Though the base layer provided some insulation when starting out, it did not become too hot when the weather warmed up.

The Cool Mesh has two offset side seams, flat-stitched and not intrusive. It's a good length too, so rear coverage is fine when on the bike. It runs quite large and is stretchy, so despite normally being a medium, a size small was fine. There's a wide range of sizes too.

9

Colours: black, white, white with Craft logo
Size tested: S
www.craft.se

Sportful BodyFit Pro Sleeveless £35

Developed in conjunction with Tinkoff-Saxo, the BodyFit Pro base layer isn't your standard mesh vest. It features two different fabrics with different characteristics. The main body is made of a denser Diablo mesh, while a more lightweight, breathable DRYnamic mesh is used for the lower back, aiding airflow where it's more needed.

Weight 57 grams

Out on the road, the Sportful base layer performed fairly well. The excellent body-hugging fit means it sits snug against the skin but never to the point of being tight. If anything, the tail was slightly too expansive, leading to excess material bunching up under my shorts. Moisture management was also reasonably good, although it struggled once I worked up a heavy sweat, at which point it was liable to stick to my body, particularly at the front.

One significant positive is the range of sizes offered by Sportful. With eight options between XXS and XXXL, finding exactly the right size shouldn't be a problem, regardless of your body shape and proportions.

7

Colours: white
Size tested: S
www.c3products.com







How do I... eat to prevent muscle pain?

Learn how to fuel up before and during, not just after, exercise to aid recovery

Vicky Ware

Consuming protein and carbohydrate post-exercise can help your recovery from training, but what about the fuel you put into your body before and during a ride?

Laurent Bannock of Guru Performance is an exercise physiologist who specialises in fuelling for exercise. "The most important strategy is to eat sufficient quantities of food every day, not just on training days, especially protein-rich foods," he says.

Bannock also suggests that carbohydrates are crucial before and after exercise — and during, if your ride lasts more than 60 minutes — "not only to fuel the exercise, but also to prevent stress to the immune system that occurs when the body is deprived of carbohydrates."

While a post-exercise drink will help recovery from damage, fuelling sufficiently before a ride may stop damage occurring in the first place. If your body has insufficient calories to fuel a ride, it will break down muscle for energy. Bannock suggests: "A protein-rich meal in the hours before exercise will still be releasing amino acids via the blood to the working muscles, which will support the body from the stress and damage to muscle tissue caused by exercise."

Inflammatory response

What about the fuel consumed during a training ride? "If you have eaten properly beforehand, that is, the day before and morning of training, you don't need any special strategy during the ride to prevent sore muscles afterwards. You need to pre-load the body with nutrients well beforehand," Bannock advises.

Though tired legs are par for the course, excessive soreness may indicate that you're not recovering properly: "Exercise is a form of stress that is normally tolerated by a fit and healthy body, but if there is already a level of stress, it can exacerbate the problem."

Stress may cause an overactive inflammatory response, limiting the body's ability to repair and rebuild muscles. Bannock explains that inflammation can be caused by "illness, under-eating and overtraining, too few days off and poor sleep".

To give your body the fuel it needs to recover, he advises eating "protein-rich foods, fats such as eggs and oily fish, enough carbohydrate and nutrient-rich vegetables and fruit."

Essential points

- Focus on everyday diet
- Get adequate protein daily
- Eat carbs if riding over 60 minutes
- Don't undereat
- Don't overtrain
- Train less if stressed



Antioxidant supplements may help prevent muscle pain post-exercise but research suggests they may stop positive adaptation to exercise in the process. It's better to go for whole foods, such as fruit and vegetables, which contain antioxidants.

Caffeine before exercise promotes fat-burning during exercise, meaning your muscle glycogen stores are spared. Research suggests this helps prevent delayed-onset muscle soreness after exercise.

A diet high in omega-3 fats has been shown to reduce muscle pain after exercise, possibly due to promotion of a more balanced immune system that can heal damaged muscle without excessive inflammation.

YOU SAY

When I'm cycling day in day out, I use foam rollers religiously and self massage my quadriceps too.
Gary Schroeder

Do the last 15 minutes on a very low gear and spin your legs.
Eddie Keogh



Adaptogens, such as Siberian ginseng, aid recovery when taken as a dietary supplement before exercise.

Glutamine is a non-essential amino acid that can significantly reduce muscle pain after exercise if used as a supplement beforehand. This may be because it stops breakdown of muscle for energy during exercise.

Taurine is an amino acid found in skeletal muscle tissue. It reduces post-exercise muscle soreness when taken as a pre-exercise supplement.

Getting enough carbohydrate during exercise is crucial to preventing excess stress on the immune system, and to fuel your muscles. A strong immune system will mean faster recovery from exercise.

Good stretch, then into cool water, whether that be a pool or a bath.
Grant Beveridge

Cold water leg bath or, at the very least, a minute of cold water on each leg at the end of a shower.
Lisa W

Like my coach told me, why stand when you can sit, why sit when you can lie down?
Aemon Atkinson

Chocolate milkshake and Greek yoghurt.
Guy Masters

Things to do this week

Try an Indian Knot

Your glutes are one of the most mistreated muscle groups when it comes to post-ride stretching. The Indian Knot manages to maintain the flexibility of the glutes and make sure they can function properly during your next ride.



- Sit on the floor and bring one leg over the other so that your knee is up against your chest.
- Tuck opposite leg underneath so that the heel is up against the opposite buttock.
- Maintain natural posture with a straight spine.
- Hold for 60sec each side. Repeat three times.

Sample OTE's strawberry flavoured protein drink

OTE is the official nutritional partner of Team LottoNL-Jumbo, and if you want to recover as well as the professionals do, this is the drink for you. OTE's strawberry-flavoured protein drink contains 23g of protein in each 52g portion. OTE has designed this drink to help repair and rebuild muscle, so you are able to recover faster after a ride. The strawberry flavour is suitable for vegetarians and for those who need to avoid lactose and gluten. If strawberry isn't to your taste, it also comes in chocolate whey and chocolate soya. A 1kg pack costs £40 and contains 20 servings.

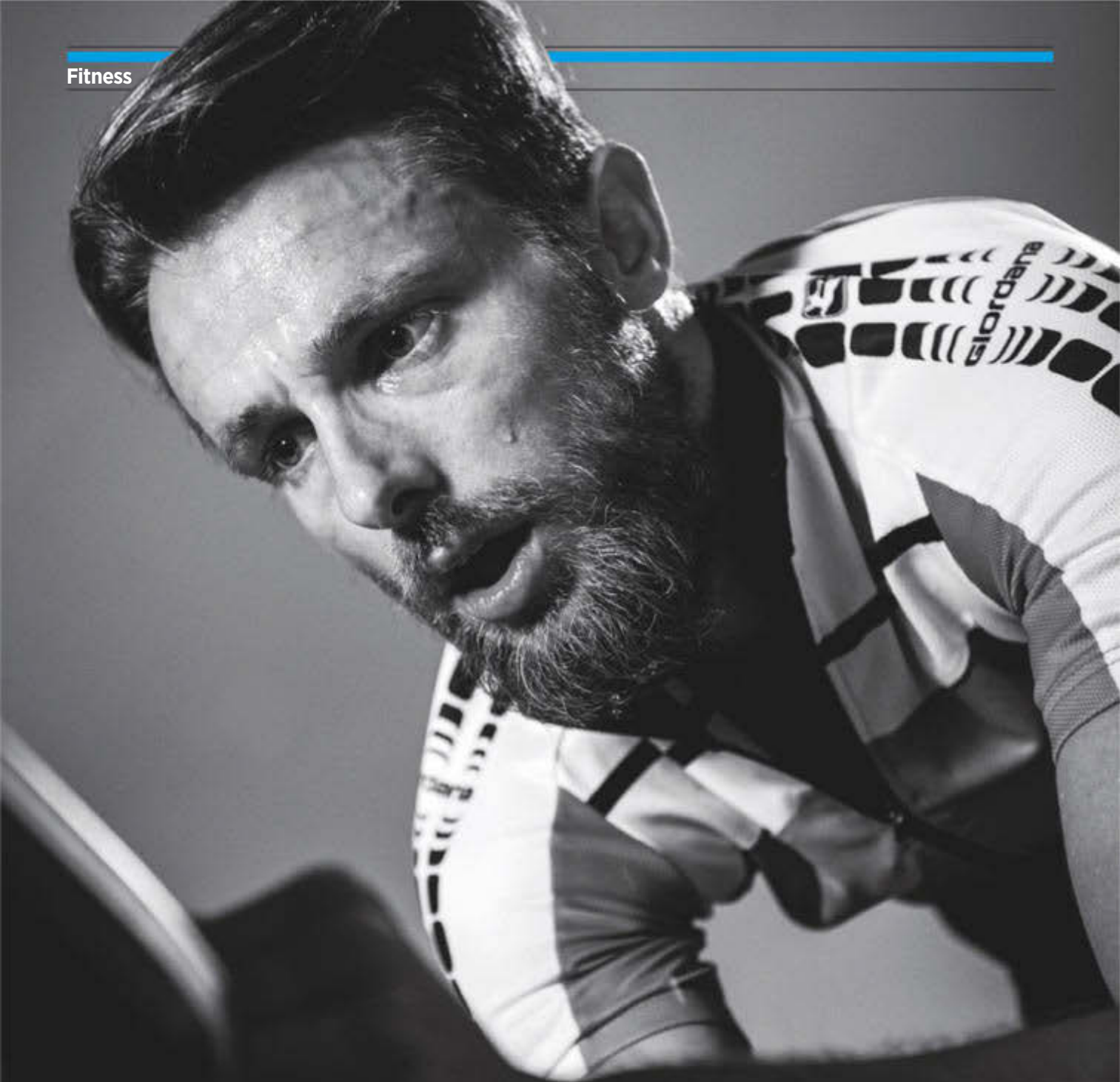


www.otesports.co.uk

Do a squat

The squat is one of the most common bodyweight exercises. They will not just improve your ability to peel yourself off the sofa when watching the Tour de France, but can be done quickly during the advert break or at work to improve your leg strength and endurance.

- Position feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart and turned out 30 degrees.
- Bend your knees to lower your body, so that your thighs are parallel with the ground.
- Put your arms out in front to balance and maintain a natural arch in your lower back.
- Pause at the bottom of the squat and repeat for three sets of eight repetitions.
- Increase difficulty by squatting with a weight held in front of your chest.



Training zones:

OBEY your numbers

Thresholds, recovery rides, training zones... What does it all mean and why does it matter? *Paul Knott* investigates further

Grand Tour riders know exactly what their power output should be, to the exact watt, at any given moment. Bradley Wiggins centred his Hour record training on 'knowing his numbers' and what he could 'sustain for the hour'. This focus on precision has trickled down to amateur level as heart-rate monitors are ousted in favour of power meters. You've got the gear; now, how to train like a pro?

Once you have established your target outputs, you need to understand how and why you are training at those specific levels. One of the many misunderstandings within cycling training is in deciphering the jargon and discovering the difference between thresholds and training zones.

Ciaran O'Grady, sports scientist at Cadence Performance, explains what the term 'threshold' means: "There is not just one threshold but many, and they each demarcate a point of change in a person's physiological response to exercise.

"The terminology used to describe these thresholds varies, and there's a big inconsistency between scientifically reported thresholds and what the public interpret," he says.

"Lactate threshold is where the body is no longer able to use predominantly aerobic means of meeting the exercise demands. Secondary to this is the lactate turn-point, [the point at which] blood lactate levels deviate from a steady state during exercise. You can also establish threshold data using expired gas analysis and some other methodologies, and each of those brings in its own terminology."

Once thresholds for these certain measurements are found, your training zones can then be determined. The *Cycling Weekly* training zones guide (see table) follows a basic structure of five zones, as O'Grady explains: "In a nutshell, not looking at any needs-analysis or specific client data, zones one, two and three would be endurance work, zones three and four would be tempo/threshold work, and zone five high-intensity interval training."

Zones do not only relate to how you should feel when riding and how to structure training, but each zone also results in different outcomes for race fitness and physiological adaptations. These training zones are related to the three energy systems the body uses when exercising: oxidative, glycolytic and ATP-PC systems.

These energy systems are employed at different levels of exercise intensity. For example, a zone-five effort mainly uses energy from ATP-PC energy system, which provides a huge amount of energy but only for a short period of time. Compare this to a zone one effort, which requires a lower level of energy maintained over a prolonged period. The energy here is supplied by the oxidative system, burning fat and carbs. There is of course much crossover between these energy systems, as the body switches between energy sources.

How to find your training zones

You can establish training zones in a number of ways, whether by riding hard for five-minute intervals before easing off to an easy 10-minute interval, all the way up to blood lactate analysis and planning your training around the thresholds that were found in a lab. However, the two most common measures used for cycling training are heart rate and functional threshold power.

"There is not one threshold but many, each demarcate a point of change"

Heart rate

Setting your training zones is based on finding out your maximum heart rate is and, from that, working out the zones. A popular method for finding your maximum heart rate has been to use simple equations, such as 214 minus (0.8 x age) for men or 209 minus (0.9 x age) for women, and the original 220 minus age. However, these methods are not very accurate; recent research and coaching techniques has suggested that this method is very outdated and shouldn't be relied on.

Maximum Heart Rate Test	
Time	**Advice/Protocol**
15-20 minutes warm up	Make sure your muscles are warmed up for seated and standing efforts. 1 x climb up chosen hill at brisk pace for five minutes to get idea of climb and gear ratios needed for maximal effort.
4 x climb (main test)	Complete four ascents of your chosen climb, increasing intensity every 30 seconds up to a sprint until you can maintain same pace.
10-15 minutes cool down	End of test, spin out legs to clear any lactic acid build up.

To ascertain your maximum heart rate accurately, you'll need to carry out a tough test. Ride four times at maximal effort to failure up a long, steady climb, the idea being that you will hit your maximum heart rate on one of the latter of the four ascents. Once you have found it, you can calculate the percentages from the training zone table accordingly.

Power (Functional Threshold Power)

To establish your training zones you need to complete a functional threshold power test. This consists of a tough hour-long session, with a 30-minute testing period. It can be completed on an indoor trainer or on the road, though there may be a discrepancy between the two — so it's best to do both.

If you are completing the test on the road, plan a route that doesn't have any major junctions so that you won't have to

Functional Threshold Power test	
Time	**Advice/Protocol**
0-20 minutes warm-up	Increase intensity throughout warm-up so that you can perform at your peak performance once the test begins
20-30 minutes main test (non-recorded)	Begin test and maintain a cadence of 90-100rpm throughout
30-50 minutes main test (recorded)	Start power meter and record average power output at the end of the 20-minute testing period
50-60 minutes cool down	End of test, maintain cadence but reduce power output to bring heart rate down to steady state

Photos: Mike Prior

stop. Despite it not pushing you to your maximum power output, the session should be very hard, with the 30-minute testing period requiring maximum sustainable power throughout.

It is crucial that you complete the initial 10-minute testing period without recording the power data, as it will allow for a steady state effort to be established and also help gauge your pacing for the rest of the test. The average power value for the 20-minute test, minus five per cent, will give you your functional threshold power (FTP). This can be used to work out training zone percentages.

It's practical to complete this on the road by yourself, but O'Grady suggests doing it indoors on a Wattbike:

"A test protocol will ideally comprise of a ramped protocol. This involves starting at a low power output, increasing in set duration stages by a certain intensity," O'Grady explains. "This is favourable over a steady-state, all-out test, as it allows for clearer identification of individual points of physiological change as intensity increases."

Training specifically with power meters and riding to a certain output isn't the be-all-end-all of training. It may tell you what power you are producing, but without a heart-rate monitor it won't indicate the physiological cost. However, heart rate can be affected on a daily basis by hydration, temperature, adrenaline and blood sugar level.

Gold standard

Lactate testing is the gold standard for determining exactly what is going on in the body, but it can be difficult to produce reliable test results. Compared to testing for heart rate and power thresholds, now available to mere mortals, accurate testing for blood lactate is a lot harder to find unless you have a batch of scientists to hand. The test consists of taking blood from a finger stick during a VO2 max test so it can be analysed for its blood lactate concentration.

Yet there is a way of estimating your lactate threshold without hiring out a laboratory to conduct the test. This requires completing a protocol similar to the 'Functional Threshold Power test' but being able to record data with a heart-rate monitor rather than a power meter.

Complete a similar 30-minute time trial effort, but only begin recording your heart rate for the final 20 minutes of the sesson. After recording your heart rate for every minute of the testing period, working out the average of these results will give an estimate for your lactate threshold level.

Lactate threshold, for an untrained person, usually coincides with 50-60 per cent of VO2max, ranging up to 85-95 per cent of VO2 max for an elite athlete.

Training by zones has lots of advantages over training without any guidance. However, it requires perseverance and patience. Your data may be affected by outside conditions such as whether you are training with a group of riders, the weather or terrain — which all needs to be factored in.

Staying in the correct zones to match your training goal avoids wasting precious training time, and you're more likely to get the results you want. ■



Find your max heart rate to set your training zones

From the expert

Ciaran O'Grady is a University of Kent postgraduate and a sports scientist at Cadence Performance in London

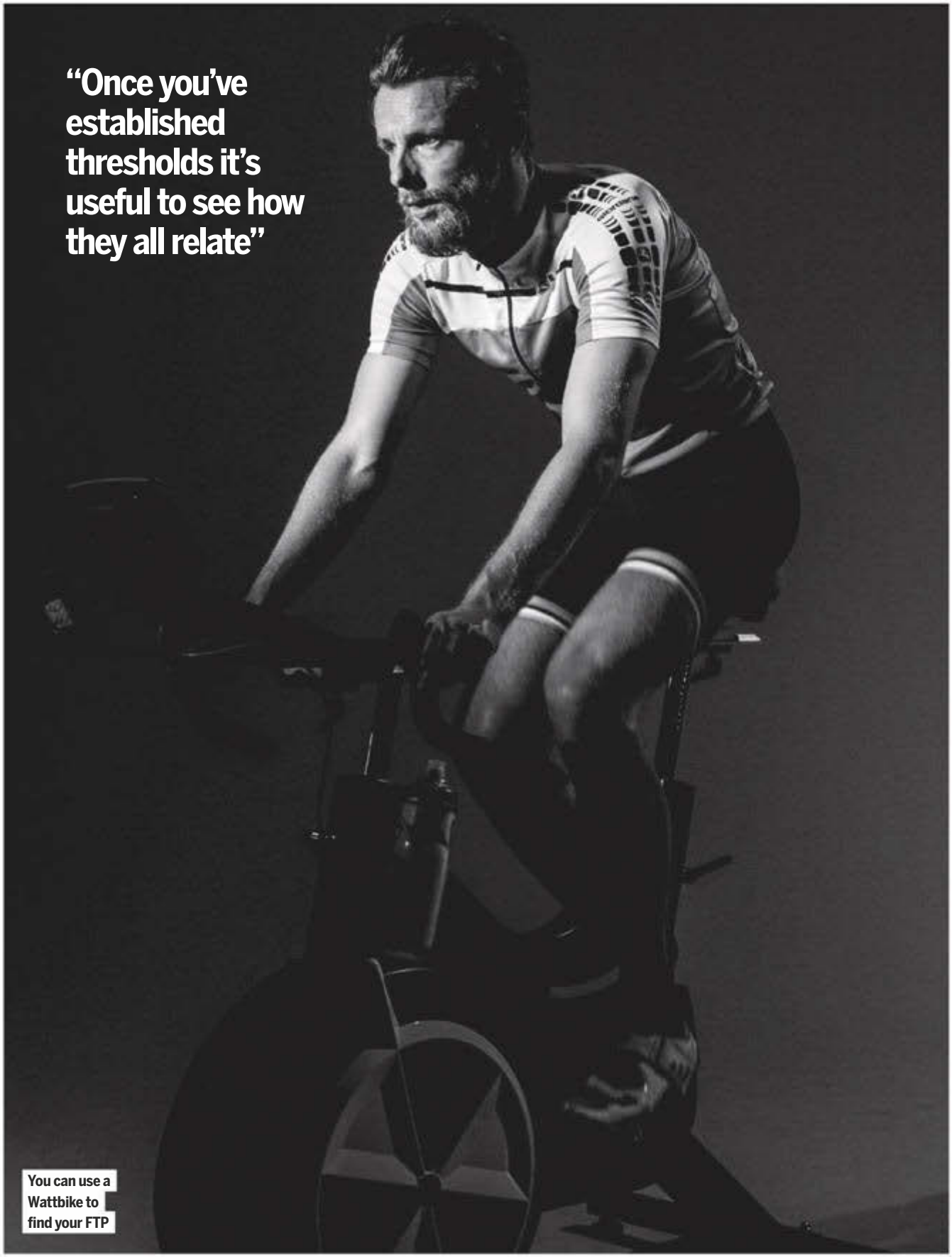
"Once you've established thresholds and maximal performances, it is useful to see how they relate to each other. Is one extremely close to the other? This will help to determine what type of training you might look to complete. Couple this with target events, available training time and baseline fitness, and a picture emerges of what training should be completed to target specific adaptations.

"Self-prescription of training can only really get you so far, as there are a lot of processes that are involved in human performance. A coach or sports scientist can identify your individual needs and go about prescribing training targeted to your case. Re-testing is important to check it's working and adjust your zones to the improvements in your fitness."

www.cadenceperformance.com

Cycling Weekly training zones guide

Zone	Effort	You can	It feels like you're	Use it for...	% Max HR	% FT Power	Physiological adaptations at this training zone (during and after)
1	Easy	Chat freely	Warming up	Warm-up, cool-down, recovery	60-65%	56-75%	Muscles become looser and body temperature gently rises.
2	Steady	Speak one sentence at a time	Riding along in the bunch on the flat	Long rides	65-75%	76-90%	Primarily oxidative energy system working. Muscle glycogen storage increases.
3	Brisk	Speak a few words at a time	Breathing deeply and working hard	Long efforts of 10 to 20min	75-82%	91-105%	Oxidative and glycolytic energy systems are both in use. The body is working just below threshold level.
4	Hard	Say only one word at a time	Really attacking (perhaps on a climb)	Efforts lasting 2-8min	82-89%	106-120%	Blood lactate levels start to increase. Hypertrophy of slow-twitch muscle fibres.
5	Very hard	Grunt and gasp	Sprinting	Efforts lasting less than 2min	89%-MHR	121%+	Heart rate, blood lactate levels and other physical parameters start to reach maximal levels.



You can use a Wattbike to find your FTP

Scott Thwaites
Diet in a day

Team Bora-Argon 18 | Age 25 | From Yorkshire



Leeds-based pro Thwaites, 25, just missed out on a Tour de France place as it hit his home roads last year, but he did score a bronze medal in the Commonwealth Games road race. Now with German team Bora-Argon 18, the punchy rider goes well both on the flat and over the lumps, and he finished both the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix this year. We asked nutritionist Danielle Davies from Human Performance Nutrition to run the rule on his diet in training.

Breakfast

I try to get breakfast at 8am before training at 10. I'm doing a hilly 90 miles in the Dales today so I fuelled up with porridge, made with water, a handful of mixed nuts and some honey for sweetness. I washed it down with green tea. I like the taste and it's a good fat burner.

730 kcalories
108g carbohydrates
22g protein
27g fat

***CW* says:**
Scott could use skimmed or semi-skimmed milk in his porridge. It adds hardly any calories and it improves taste. He used a cup and a half of oats — a rock solid platform for training with slow release energy. Nuts add fatty acids and most people are deficient in these. He could add 25g of whey protein because the protein in porridge is good, but not optimal. There's weak evidence from research that green tea helps raise the metabolism, but you need a lot. Better to take it in supplement form.



756 kcalories
151g carbohydrates
8.4g protein
10g fat

ON THE BIKE

Two bottles of plain water, a couple of bananas and two energy bars from team nutritional partner Born. I was out five hours, so I gave myself a coffee stop between two medium-intensity efforts with a slab of homemade banana loaf.

***CW* says:**
The banana loaf is high GI, which means it will cause a spike in blood sugar, but that's fine in the middle of a training session, especially coming between his harder efforts.

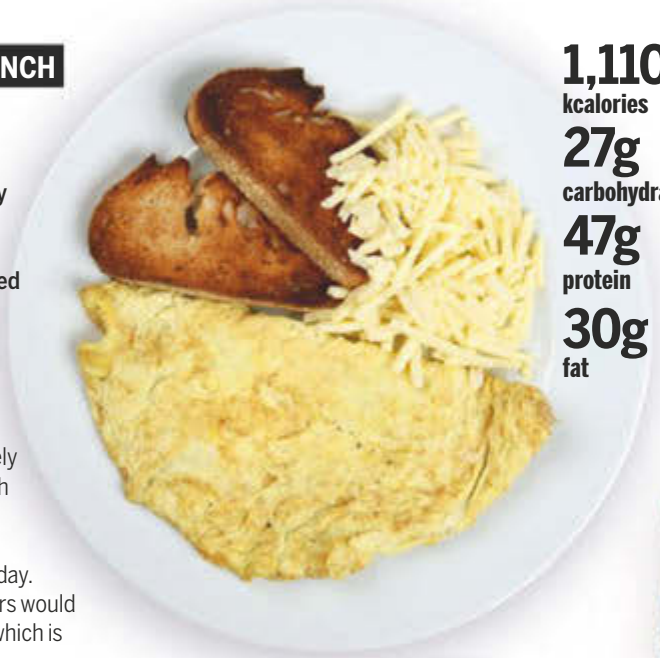
Photo: Andy Jones

POST-RIDE SNACK AND LUNCH

I filled the immediate hunger gap with a bar of supermarket flapjack — not very scientific I know! I made up for it with a proper Born recovery drink with all the stuff in it I know I need. After a shower, I had a three-egg omelette with a handful of grated cheese on two slices of buttered toast and plenty of water to drink.

***CW* says:**

Supermarket flapjack can be syrupy which is high GI carbs. But immediately after training, that's fine. Scott's lunch has an excellent 30g protein — and the good thing is that he spreads his protein intake evenly throughout the day. Adding perhaps tomatoes and peppers would increase the antioxidant properties, which is good for recovery.



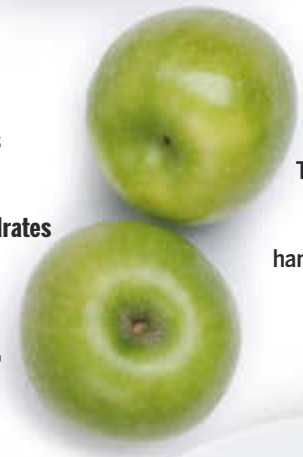
1,110 kcalories
27g carbohydrates
47g protein
30g fat







771 kcalories
81g carbohydrates
8g protein
30g fat



SNACK

Two apples, plus 200g of natural yoghurt with a handful of granola.

DAILY INTAKE

4,642 kcalories
507g carbohydrates
152.2g protein
127g fat

DINNER

I don't do this very often, especially in season, but I went out for a curry. I tried to keep the choice as healthy as possible and went for chicken and spinach curry with plain boiled rice and naan bread. I washed it down with a pint of water.

***CW* says:**

Curry houses usually use ghee, or clarified butter, and that's pretty calorific stuff. Scott is 69kg and 178cm tall so weight management is obviously not a big problem for him. But this is definitely best enjoyed as an occasional treat!

1,275 kcalories
140g carbohydrates
66.8g protein
30g fat



Could water be the best remedy?

Scientists look into the effects of dehydration on immune function

Andrew Hamilton

The phenomenon of post-exercise immune suppression — a dip in immunity after long or hard bouts of exercise — is well documented, and is thought to explain why those undergoing hard training are at greater risk of upper respiratory tract infections (coughs, colds, sore throats, etc.). However, some studies also suggested that hydration status during exercise might affect immune function, with dehydration further impairing immunity compared to staying fully hydrated.

The good news

A new study has investigated the effect of hydration status during exercise on subsequent immunity. Ten men completed two separate trials. In one trial they cycled for two hours at six per cent of their maximum sustainable power (moderate intensity) in a fully hydrated state. In the other, they completed the same trial but after a 24-hour period of fluid restriction, i.e. dehydrated. Before and for three hours after each trial, researchers measured levels of antimicrobial proteins in the cyclists' saliva — proteins that play a vital role in defending the upper respiratory tract from infection.

Unsurprisingly, when the cyclists were dehydrated, they produced less saliva than when fully hydrated. However, this didn't seem to affect the levels of antimicrobial proteins. Indeed, in the dehydrated state, the rate of secretion of a protein called lactoferrin was higher, and the salivary concentrations of two other proteins (secretory immunoglobulin A and lysozyme) were also higher. Together, these results showed that exercising while dehydrated had no negative effect on salivary antimicrobial proteins and the immunity they provide — encouraging news for cyclists who sometimes end up a little dry in the mouth at the end of a ride!

Eur J Appl Physiol. 2015 Apr 19. [Epub ahead of print]



Hydration is an important part of training

Photo: Daniel Gould

Great for...

recovery meal

Lamb skewers, crushed peas, tzatziki and chilli

This spicy, Middle Eastern-inspired dish provides a good dose of protein, making it an excellent choice for a post-ride recovery treat.

INGREDIENTS:

For the lamb
- 800g diced leg of lamb
- Small bunch of thyme chopped
- 1 lemon zested and juiced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper

For crushed peas
- 200g fresh peas, shelled and cooked
- Small bunch of parsley, chopped
- Half lemon, juiced
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper

For tzatziki
- 150g Greek yoghurt
- ½ cucumber deseeded and finely chopped
- Small bunch of mint, shredded
- Salt and pepper



NUTRITION PER SERVING:

751 kcalories

47.5g carbohydrates

48g protein

40.9g fat

METHOD:

1) Marinade the lamb in a medium-sized bowl with the thyme, lemon and olive oil, season with salt and pepper and set aside.
2) In a food processor blend the cooked peas, parsley, lemon juice and olive oil for 30 seconds, remove and season with salt and pepper and then set aside.
3) In a small bowl, mix together the Greek yoghurt, cucumber and mint and then season with salt and pepper and set aside.
4) Preheat a griddle pan. Then divide the lamb between four skewers and place on the griddle for three minutes each side. The lamb should be slightly pink in the middle.
5) When the lamb is cooked, divide between four plates and serve with the crushed peas, tzatziki, warm pitta and lemon wedges.
6) Sprinkle with the chopped chilli and serve.

Time taken: 40min

TAKE HOME TRAINING SESSION

Short, steep climb

CW has teamed up with Wattbike sports scientist Eddie Fletcher to devise some new training sessions. This week we take a look at how to train for those short, sharp climbs

These short, sharp efforts can be broken down and paced similar to a long climb. This indoor training session will also help you reach the top of the climb that little bit faster.

Using rollers, turbo-trainer or a Wattbike, warm up for 15 minutes, steadily increasing the intensity and cadence to over 90rpm.

Once you have completed the warm-up, increase the intensity slowly over the first five-minute period, culminating in an all-out maximal effort for the final minute at more than 100rpm.

The following five-minute section should consist of an active recovery ride. Despite it being ridden at a lesser intensity, it should still be ridden at a cadence of 90rpm but just at a much lower resistance level, so leg speed is maintained throughout the entire session.

Repeat this cycle five times before a 10-minute cool-down.

Make sure you have a strong and even pedal stroke throughout the session even when you are at maximal effort. This session requires mental strength and patience so be prepared to stick with it.

Time taken: 80min

Time (minutes)	Zone
0-15	1-2
15-20	3-4
20-25	2
25-30	3-4
30-35	2
35-40	3-4
40-45	2
45-50	3-4
50-55	2
55-60	3-4
60-65	2
65-80	1-2

Effort	You can	It feels like you're...	Use it for...	% Max heart rate	% FT power
Easy Zone 1	Chat freely	Warming up	Warm-ups, cool-downs and recovery	60-65%	56-75%
Steady Zone 2	Speak one sentence at a time	Riding along in the bunch on the flat	Long rides	65-75%	76-90%
Brisk Zone 3	Speak a few words at a time	Breathing deeply and working hard	Long efforts of 10 to 20min	75-82%	91-105%
Hard Zone 4	Say only one word at a time	Really attacking (perhaps on a climb)	Efforts lasting 2-8min	82-89%	106-120%
Very hard Zone 5	Grunt and gasp	Sprinting	Efforts lasting less than 2min	89%-MHR	121%+

Malvern Mad Hatter

CW Difficulty rating: 5/10

This year's event: August 23

72 miles

1,322 metres ascent

Enjoy the views of the Black Mountains on this ride without putting your legs in too much distress

There aren't many events where you get to enjoy the majesty of mountains on the horizon without having to — eventually — climb them. But the Malvern Mad Hatter offers just that. With only 1,322 metres of total climbing over the 72-mile route, the undulating roads weave in the shadow of the Malvern Ridgeway. OK, you eventually have to make your way to the top of this ridgeway,

Where is it?

From the Three Counties Showground, the route heads north traversing through the Malvern Hills, climbing up the Malvern Ridgeway for views over the Black Mountains of Wales. From Worcestershire, it drops south to Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, weaving between the Malvern and Cotswold hills.

Why ride it?

For stunning mountainous views, over into Wales, of the Black Mountains in the Brecon Beacons National Park. If you take on the full route, you will also travel through three counties — not bad in just one day of riding.

History

The first Malvern Mad Hatter rolled out in 2013, when the *Cycling Weekly* road sportive series expanded from two to seven events. Each year, the route has been tweaked slightly to take riders on a different road up the ridgeway. Last year's event attracted just over 1,000 weekend warriors.

Words: Jocelyn Mack / Photos: Jesse Wild



How to enter

You can register on the day if there are places available, but why risk it when you can register online? Head to www.bookmyride.co.uk

HQ details

The Three Counties Showground is accessible from the B4209, just off the A449, in Great Malvern. Travelling from the north take junction seven, M5, from the south leave at junction eight and follow the M50 to junction two.

Where to stay

Holdfast Cottage Hotel and The Dell House are each under three miles from the start line. In Great Malvern itself, there is The Pembridge, Copper Beech House or The Abbey Hotel. The Swan Hotel is on the riverside at Upton upon Severn just five miles away.

Where to eat

The Marlbank Inn is a rustic real ale pub in Welland, while the Blubell Inn, Barnards Green, has great views over the Malvern Hills. In Malvern there is the Fig Tree for Mediterranean food, the Flute Signature for Indian or the Priory View Restaurant at Abbey Hotel.

Local bike shop

There is Detour Cycles on Worcester Road or Back on Track Bikes on North Malvern Road.



Through sumptuous terrain the road does wind...

but it's from here that you'll be gazing over the impressive Black Mountains all the way into Wales.

The ride aptly begins from the Three Counties Showground — another of the event's selling points as, if you're up for taking on the 103-mile route, you'll travel through Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

Rolling out from the foot of the Malvern Hills the first few miles follow the flat floodplain of the River Severn northwards, to skirt the town of Worcester. There isn't much to test the legs at this point so if you're looking to make your ride that bit more challenging then go strong from the start.

As you make your way between sleepy villages nestled in the Malvern Hills, the Ridgeway is never far from sight, teasing you with its altitude as it looms over the surrounding counties.

The most northerly point of the route is at the village of Knightwick that lies on a tributary to the River Severn, the Teme. From here you're brushing the edges of the Suckley Hills and the climbing begins. The quiet roads are lined with leafy hedges, and as you approach the village of Bishop's Frome the road rises, snaking between rolling patchwork fields. Oast houses dominate many of the villages and cider apple orchards dot the route.

Turning eastwards towards Great Malvern it's time to climb the Ridgeway. It's the toughest climb on the route, with an average gradient of eight per cent.

Turning right onto West Malvern Road you'll be greeted with the views that are undoubtedly what you came for: the Black Mountains, and tucked just behind them, the Brecon Beacons of Wales. The most open view is just before the junction, at the end of this road, so be sure to steal a glance.

With the breeze blowing over the abundant hedgerows and through the lush orchards, we were surprised to hear the noise of car engines as we crossed over the top of the busy M50. This comes just after the route split where, those up for a ride of epic 103-mile proportions, will swing west into Herefordshire.

We made our way into Gloucestershire, where the hedges drop away revealing views back towards the Malvern Hills. The roads continue in their rolling form so if you're feeling strong you don't need to hold back for anything — try to clock up a good time and go for gold. You'll pass over the River Leadon and turn northwards through the picturesque village of Staunton, where the Malvern Ridgeway will be in sight once more. After passing through Welland village it's just one mile to the finish line and back to the foot of the Malvern Hills. ■

ORGANISER'S TARGET TIMES

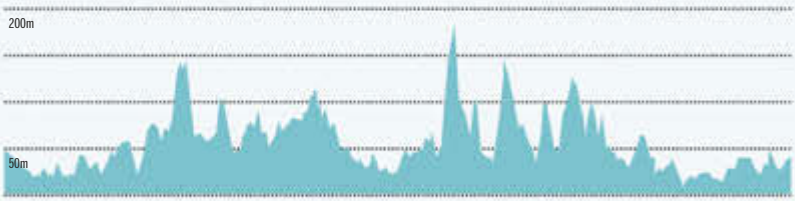
Route	Award	Distance	Ave speed (men)	Time	Avg speed (women)	Time
Epic	Gold	103	>15.5 mph	<6hr 38min	>14.5 mph	<7hr 6min
Epic	Silver	103	>14 mph	<7hr 21min	>13 mph	<7hr 55min
Epic	Bronze	103	<14 mph	>7hr 21min	<13 mph	>7hr 55min
Standard	Gold	72	>15.5 mph	<4hr 38min	>14.5 mph	<4hr 57min
Standard	Silver	72	>14 mph	<5hr 8min	>13 mph	<5hr 32min
Standard	Bronze	72	<14 mph	>5hr 8min	<13 mph	>5hr 32min
Short	Gold	43	>15.5 mph	<2hr 46min	>14.5 mph	<2hr 57min
Short	Silver	43	>14 mph	<3hr 4min	>13 mph	<3hr 18min
Short	Bronze	43	<14 mph	>3hr 4min	<13 mph	>3hr 18min

The challenges

1 Suckley to Acton Green
This gradual climb will take you up between patchwork fields. With lush hedgerows and sweeping bends you can never quite see the top. It's not too steep so settle into a nice rhythm.

2 B4214
This push up to Stanley Hill is short and sharp and on the descent out of the village you'll glimpse a view of the Malvern Hills over to your left.

3 Jubilee Drive
You will have had a couple of miles to spin the legs out before this short, sharp push, that comes as you leave Worcestershire and enter either Herefordshire or Gloucestershire depending on your route of choice.



NAIL IT

4 Harcourt Road
After leaving Ham Green, just after the row of Tudor houses the climb begins for real. Before this, those 5-8 per cent sections were merely a warm up. The climb is 3km long with a 144m height gain and, in parts, the road rears up to 18 per cent before settling at around eight. The road turns more residential towards the top, where it ramps up again and leaves you with a nine per cent rise and a rather tight right-hand turn onto West Malvern Road.



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Event website & GPX file: bookmyride.co.uk

Stirling Bike Club

Trevor Ward visits a lively and welcoming Scottish club with its sights set firmly on the future

Nine-year-old Stirling Bike Club member Jake has the perfect surname for a cyclist — Speed. He's also wearing Sir Bradley Wiggins's gloves. "We went to Paris-Roubaix and Sir Bradley saw my brother [Alex, aged six] under the Team Sky bus. He had crawled under to get in front of the crowd. So they invited me, him and my dad on the bus," says Jake as he struggles to lift a cup of coffee to his mouth while wearing Wiggo's mitts. "My dad wanted to frame them, but I wanted to wear them."

Jake's father Grant looks a bit sheepish and tries to hide behind his pre-ride espresso. He and Jake are among 30 club members who have turned out on a wet and blustery Sunday morning for a "recovery ride", most of them having already put in some serious miles the previous day during an annual event to celebrate the life of the club's former 'route master' Lew Weaver, who died three years ago.

"He took us on rides all over Scotland. He knew some brilliant routes — he was like a human GPS — and some of them have gone to the grave with him as no one can quite remember them," says 'Shazza' Walthew, as we clip in and head out of the city centre towards the open, rolling countryside of central Scotland.

It quickly becomes clear that 'inclusivity' isn't just a trendy phrase at Stirling BC, but a genuine USP. At various stages during the next few hours I find myself riding alongside a 15-year-old national champion, a 47-year-old female racing debutante, a couple of portly gents trying to lose weight, and 'Shazza', who turns out to be a highly competitive grandmother. "Whenever one of the younger members makes a big deal about beating me up a hill, I just remind them I have a two-year-old grandchild. That normally shuts them up," she smiles.

Wallace Warriors

As we reach the exposed, desolate plateau of Comrie Moor, junior Rhona Callander is regularly unclipping her left foot and giving her crank a good kicking. A voice from behind pipes up: "Uh-oh! Rhona's got a mechanical. Normally she just has to stick her hand up and a team car will appear straight away!"

It's a light-hearted reference to the fact that 15-year-old Callander is one of the rising stars of the club, and a product of its youth development programme, the Wallace Warriors. She's racing up to twice a week at National Youth A level, so her equipment takes some pounding — today it's the dust cap on her left crank

Club facts

Based: Stirling, Central Scotland
Members: 330
Formed: 2000
Meets: The Peak at Stirling Sports Village. Saturday training and social rides; Tuesday night chaingangs and Thursday night skills sessions during summer; ad hoc Sunday morning rides.

History

Stirling BC was formed at the end of 2000 when Stirling Mountain Bike Club amalgamated with the roadies of Velo Cog Olympia. Its initial membership numbered 30. "If you couldn't keep up with the VC Olympia boys, you had to fend for yourself," remembers Stirling BC road rep Jim Tierney. "Nowadays we have a simple motto: no one gets left behind."

The club's membership is now 330, with almost a third of that female. It is particularly proud of its youth section, the Wallace Warriors, which has 80 members and a long waiting list.

The legend of 'Braveheart' William Wallace — who defeated the dastardly English at Stirling in 1297 — is reflected in the club's choice of kit design, which features the Scottish saltire flag.

The club has recently added two prestigious events to the Scottish racing calendar: Crit on the Campus — held on the grounds of Stirling University — and Crit under the Castle, a closed circuit around the city centre which features a cobbled climb up to the esplanade of Stirling Castle and attracted an elite field of men and women to its inaugural edition last summer. Another popular event is the notoriously hilly Battle of the Braes TT, which is an open, National B-level event.

At the club's Thursday night skills sessions, held in a park and ride car park on the edge of the city, youths and adults can take part in mini-criteriums to improve their cornering and racing techniques, or learn the etiquette of riding in a group or chaingang.

Achievements

It's the juniors of the Wallace Warriors who dominate the club's list of successes:

- Rhona Callander won a clean sweep of gold in the road, track and TT at the Scottish Cycling Championships, as well as winning the Scottish Junior Women's 2,000m Pursuit.
- Callander also won the Scottish Youth A cyclo-cross championship, with club-mate Jenny Holl finishing second. Rhona was also a silver medallist at the British Youth A Madison Championships. Callander and Holl are on the long list to represent Team GB on the road in the European Youth Olympics in Georgia this summer.
- Callander, Holl and club-mate Amber King are three of only five Scottish girls to be selected for British Cycling's Olympic Development Apprenticeship programme.
- Callum Reid is Scottish Youth C cyclo-cross champion.
- Meanwhile, among the seniors, Nigel Holl and Graeme Walsh finished third and fourth in the Mersey 24 last year with 462.48 and 461.78 miles respectively.



Photos: Andy McCandlish




STIRLING


WALLACE
WARRIORS
Sport
STIRLING
CLUB


STIRLING
BIKE CLUB

Stirling BC club run

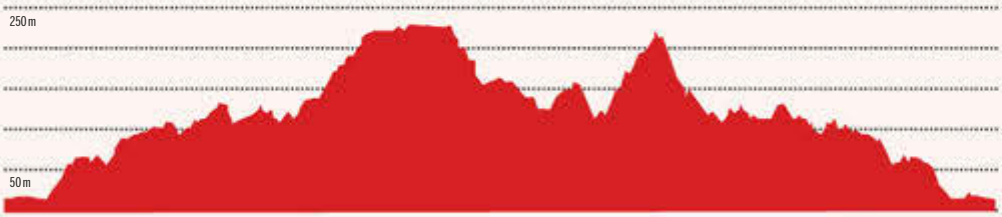
Ride highlights

40 MILES

1 Comrie Moor
A long but shallow climb to a stunning and windswept plateau, where you could easily imagine Mel Gibson waving his big sword at the English invaders.

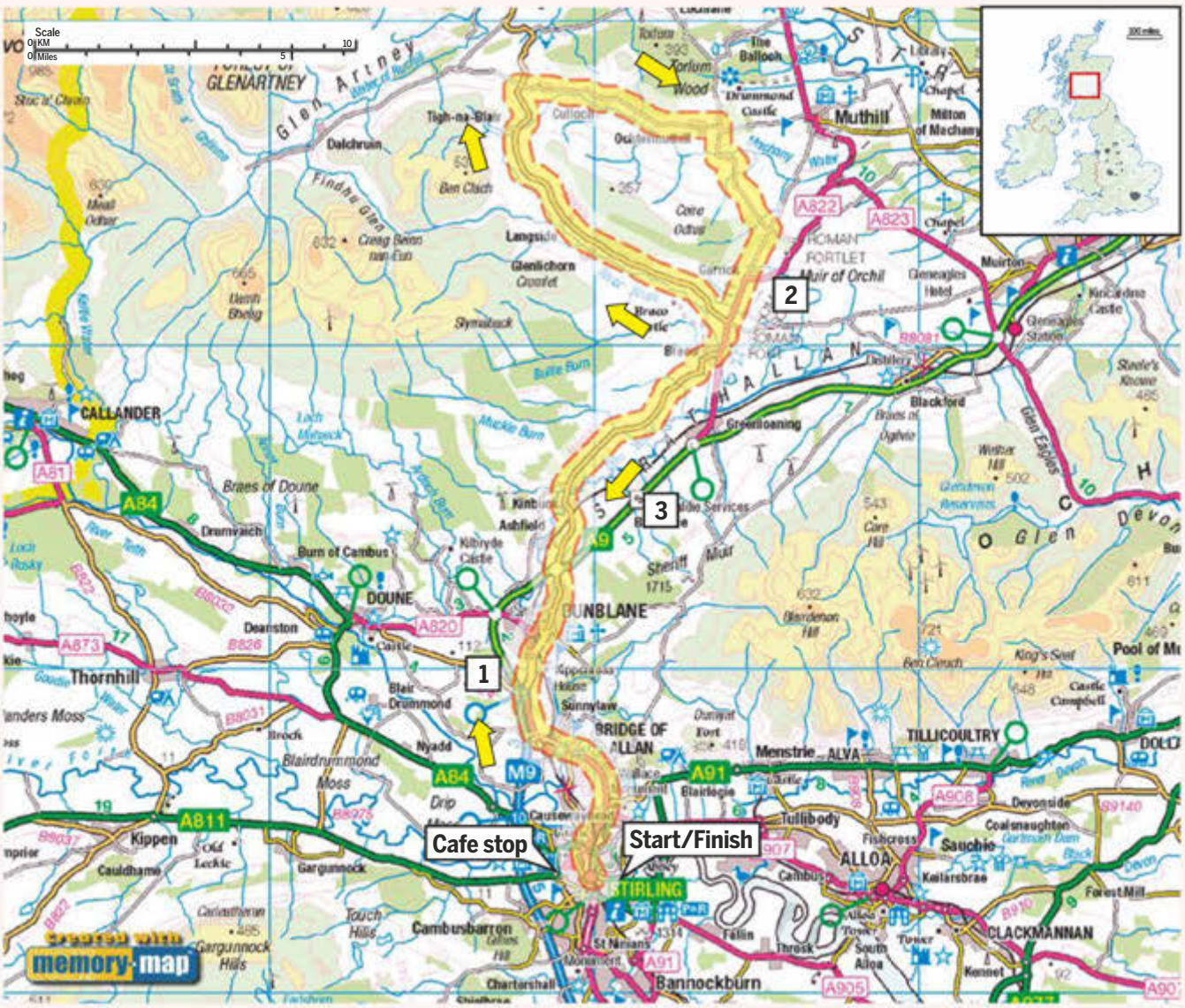
2 Roman Road
Another long but gentle drag along scenic country lanes past the occasional picture postcard farmhouse. From the top it's downhill all the way home.

3 Cromlix House
Situated near the scene of another famous battle between the Scots and English (Sherrifmuir, 1715), this hotel and restaurant is owned by local hero Andy Murray.



Favourite cafe

Rides usually finish at Corrieri's Cafe, situated on the edge of Stirling city centre beneath the hilltop monument to William Wallace. The popular, bustling venue does an eclectic mix of fish and chips, mugs of tea, thin crust pizzas — baked in an authentic Italian pizza oven — and calorific Italian desserts including homemade ice cream. Paintings depicting famous scenes from the Giro adorn the walls, while signed cycling jerseys — including one from former Stirling BC member Brian Smith — hang above the bar. The cafe sponsors the club's first 10-mile TT of the season.



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Post-ride coffees at Corrieri's Cafe



Stirling take the high road



An eclectic range of riders attend the outings

— and her only sponsors are "my mum and dad".

Despite her busy schedule she still joins in with the club's Tuesday night chaingangs, holding her own against senior riders. "I love them. You can get up to 20 people out, though it depends on the weather," she says.

"Tail!" comes a shout from the back, and we switch to single file. We are now on rolling roads overlooking Perthshire. Once the car has passed, 14-year-old Logan Maclean accelerates with the confidence of a seasoned senior, shouting: "This is where the attacks start!"

Back at the cafe, Donald McLean, the club's British Cycling certified coach who helped set up the Warriors programme, says: "We've opened our Thursday night skill sessions to adults as well as juniors, so that the top end youths get experience of riding with adults. That's an important part of their development."

But for nine-year-old Jake Sharp — who took a short cut back to Stirling with his dad — the secret of success is at his fingertips: "Sir Bradley's gloves definitely helped," he says. ■

Contact: www.stirlingbikeclub.org.uk Twitter: @StirlingBC Facebook: /Stirling Bike Club

Meet the club



Gill Brett: "The mini-crits on Thursday nights have really improved my confidence. I completed my first race last month. It was ballistic but I managed to hold on."



Grant and Jake Speed, nine: "Riding with the club gives discipline to your training. Knowing there are other riders there means you can't stay in bed instead."



'Shazza' Walthew: "It's about much more than just cycling. I've made new friends I go out to dinner or even on holidays with."



Christine Fischer: "I joined to make friends and discover the local roads after I had just moved here from Glasgow. It's been a success on both counts."


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Mow Cop

Mow Cop, Staffordshire

Simon Warren

Mow Cop, or the Killer Mile as it's also known, rises out of Cheshire and crosses into Staffordshire to finish in the shadow of Mow Cop Castle. The castle lies in ruins, which is what your legs will be in when you get there. The hill is famous all over the country and has been the venue for the Killer Mile time trial since the early 1980s, and is now the star attraction of the Cheshire Cat Sportive.

Leaving the railway crossing at its base, the early slopes are mild with a couple of tough ramps thrown in to make you sweat. Mow Cop, though, is all about the 200 metres of 25 per cent tarmac at the top that will be lined with blood-hungry photographers during a sportive, waiting to capture the moment underprepared riders succumb to its ferocious gradient.

CW Difficulty rating: 9/10

To deny them their pleasure, make sure you have a tiny gear fitted and attack it with as much speed as you can muster. Think of nothing but the top, keep pedalling, and you will make it.



Can you handle the Killer Mile?

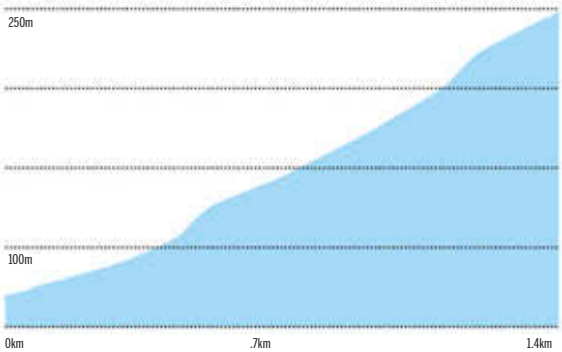
The stats

WHERE Leave the A34 and ride east through Scholar Green on Station Road. Take the left where the road splits, then the next right up Drumber Lane to the climb.



KOM Top Tip Don't use your smallest gear until you see the 25 per cent sign

1.4km	275m	164m	11%	25%
Length	Summit height	Height gain	Average gradient	Max gradient



Strava file: www.strava.com/segments/8268038



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Bottrill and Skipper smash the opposition

A week after being crowned national 50-mile time trial champion, Matt Bottrill posted the fastest 25-mile time of the year in the Walsall RC event at Etwall in Derbyshire on Saturday.

The 37-year-old drag2zero.com rider clocked a time of 46.30 for the A25/11 course, taking victory just days after his mother had been diagnosed with cancer.

Second place went to with North Lancashire RC's Steve Irwin, who also went second in the year's fastest table with 47.08, while Team Swift's Andy Jackson was third with 47.16.

In East Sussex, Peter Tadros was celebrating a double-winning weekend after taking top spot in both the Eastbourne Rovers 10- and 25-mile events.

The veteran InGear-Quickvit-Trainsharp RT rider won the Stan Nash Memorial 10-mile event on Saturday with 20.55 and followed it up with 52.39 in the 25-mile trial on Sunday.

Elsewhere, Tim Cartwright rode 10 miles in under 20 minutes for the first time on his way to victory in the Newbury RC event on Saturday. In the biggest ever field of entries in the event's history, the home club rider won with a time of 19.53.

Anthony Bromley (Barnsley RC) topped the standings in the Yorkshire RC 25 with 51.54 and in the Manchester and District TTA 50, Glossop Kinder Velo's Mark Nulty won with a time of 1:52.54.

On Sunday, Joe Skipper broke the course record for the B50/17 in Wortwell, Norfolk with a winning 1:46.39 in the VC Baracchi event.

In circuit racing, Chris Opie headed up a One Pro Cycling one-two finish in the Harrogate Big Bike Bash. He went clear of team-mate Josh Hunt in the closing stages of the race. SportGrub-Kuota's Richard Hepworth finished third.

In the Bristol Grand Prix victory in the elite race went to James Phillips (Dream Cycling) after breaking away to beat Stephen Bradbury (Velosure-Starley-Primal).

And on the open road, teenager George Wood took a comfortable victory in the Redhill CC Road Race in Surrey. From a break of five, the 19-year-old Richardson's-Trek rider had a comfortable lead from Pedal Heaven's Lewis Atkins as he crossed the line.

Performance of the week

Matt Bottrill (drag2zero.com)

Walsall RC 25, Derbyshire

The 37-year-old recorded the fastest 25-mile time of the season so far on A25/11 at Etwall on Saturday — 46.30 — just days after his mother was diagnosed with cancer.



Bottrill: fastest man over 25 miles in 2015

Photos: Andy Jones, c/o Virgin Money Cyclone Festival of Cycling

Road racing

Sunday, June 21

Beaumont Trophy (Stamfordham, Northumberland):

E, 1, 2: 1. Chris Latham (Great Britain National Team) 117 miles in 4:35.52; 2. T. Stewart (Madison-Genesis); 3. Y. Barker (One Pro Cycling); 4. J. McEvoy (NFTO) all same time; 5. K. Domagalski (Raleigh-GAC) +0.02; 6. I. Bibby (NFTO) +0.03; 7. G. Cullaigh (Great Britain National Team); 8. L. Holohan (Madison-Genesis) all st; 9. T. Geoghegan-Hart (Great Britain National Team) +0.11; 10. P. Williams (One Pro Cycling) +0.56.

Curlew Cup (Stamfordham, Northumberland, Women's National Road Series):

E, 1, 2, 3: 1. Laura Massey (IKON Mazda) 62 miles in 2:50.12; 2. E. Dickinson (Giordana-Triton); 3. E. Holden (Giordana-Triton); 4. A. Park (Giordana Triton); 5. N. Juniper (Giordana-Triton); 6. R. Nixon (Fusion RT); 7. E. Hopkins (IKON-Mazda); 8. A. Parkinson (Giordana-Triton); 9. C. Fraser (Team Rytger); 10. B. Hayward (Pearl Izumi) all st.

Balgay Park Criterium (Dundee, Tayside):

3, 4: 1. Fergus Brown (Unattached) 26 miles in 1:00.43; 2. R. McGhee (Glasgow Nightingale CC) +0.03; 3. C. Kennedy (Edinburgh RC); 4. C. Gray (Peebles CC); 5. J. Macleod (Spokes RT); 6. P. Sharp (Hardie Bikes) all same time; 7. A. Kitchin (Edinburgh RC) +0.43; 8. J. Graham (Team Right Move Windows) +0.49; 9. N. Baxter (Cairngorn CC) +1.25; 10. S. Grady (GJS Cruis Racing) +1.35.
Women E, 1, 2, 3, 4: 1. Lorna Ferguson (Glasgow Green CC) 22 miles in 1:00.40; 2. E. McDermott (Team WattCycle); 3. K. Gallagher (Carse of Gowrie Velo); 4. E. Middleditch (Deeside Thistle CC) all same time; 5. N. Munro (Moray Firth CC) +0.03; 6. A. Fraser (Deeside Thistle CC) st.
Youth: Under-16/14s: 1. Lewis Stewart (Glasgow Riderz) 49.13; 2. D. Mulholland (Johnstone Wheelers); 3. S. Pryde (Deeside Thistle CC) +0.02; 4. J. Hilbourne (Glasgow Riderz) +0.07; 5. A. Merry (Discovery Junior CC) +1.13; 6. M. Devlin (Edinburgh RC) +2.47. **Girls:** Jenny Holl (Stirling BC).
Under-12s: 1. Fraser Gault (Ythan CC) 21.24; 2. C. Reid (Rock and Road Cycles); 3. M. Lawson (Edinburgh RC) all st; 4. F. Fuller (Edinburgh RC) +0.31; 5. E. Walkingshaw (Edinburgh RC) +0.41; 6. A. Ellen (Edinburgh RC) +0.50. **Girls:** Eva Young (Royal Albert CC).

Climb on Bikes Spring Road Race (Weobley, Herefordshire):

2, 3, 4: 1. Andrew Williams (Cwmcarn Paragon CC) 56 miles in 2:34.41; 2. R. Harris (Cwmcarn Paragon CC) +0.13; 3. D. Axford (Arctic Tacx RT) +0.15; 4. J. Atkins (Ride Coventry) +0.29; 5. G. Bartlett (NFTO Race Club) +0.46; 6. B. Mansfield-Yorke (Wolverhampton Wh); 7. L. Bromiley (University of Bath Cycling Club); 8. A. Touche (Cwmcarn Paragon CC); 9. M. Bonehill (Mammoth Lifestyle Racing Team); 10. G. Smith (Gillingham and District Wheelers) all st.

Saturday, June 20

Harrogate Big Bike Bash (Harrogate, North Yorkshire):

E, 1, 2, 3 (1 hr plus 5 laps): 1. Chris Opie (One Pro Cycling); 2. J. Hunt (One Pro Cycling); 3. R. Hepworth (SportGrub-Kuota); 4. S. Williams (One Pro Cycling); 5. R. Davis (SportGrub-Kuota); 6. M. Woffindin (Cycle Sport Pendle); 7. W. Brown (Achieve-Northwide); 8. S. Bewley (Orica-GreenEdge); 9. P. Williams (One Pro Cycling); 10. A. Blythe (Orica-GreenEdge).
2, 3, 4 (45 mins): 1. Thomas Pidcock (Speedflex RT); 2. L. Brown (Holmfirth CC); 3. A. Hartley (VCUK-PH Mas); 4. G. Turnbull (Patron); 5. S. Douby (Birdwell Wheelers); 6. W. Cowen (Clay Cross RT); 7. L. Kellet (Airedale Chemical RT); 8. G. Taylor (Speedflex RT); 9. A. Webster (Team Moda-Anon); 10. R. Ormrod (Ilkley CC).

Redhill CC Road Race (Newdigate, Surrey):

E, 1, 2, 3: 1. George Wood (Richardsons-Trek RT) 83 miles in 3:09.00; 2. L. Atkins (Pedal Heaven RT); 3. C. Snook (Nuun-Sigma Sport-London RT); 4. R. Unwin (VC Meudon); 5. J. Caldwell (Richardsons-Trek RT); 6. W. Harper (Pedal Heaven RT); 7. D. Hewett (Adalta Cycling Club); 8. R. Visser (Danny Shane-Storck Racing); 9. M. Cryer (Army Cycling Union); 10. S. Coles (Norwood Paragon CC).

Bristol Grand Prix (Bristol, Avon):

E, 1, 2 (50 minutes plus three laps): 1. James Phillips (Dream Cycling Race Team); 2. S. Bradbury (Velosure-Starley-Primal); 3. C. Croft (Primera Sports.com); 4. S. Holt (Pedal Heaven RT); 5. D. Bigham (Beeline Bicycles RT); 6. J. Wiltshire (NFTO); 7. J. White (T1Diabetes.info); 8. J. Williams (Team Tor 2000); 9. E. Georgi (Giant Cycling Club Halo Films); 10. J. Notley (Mammoth Lifestyle RT).
Women (40 minutes plus three laps): 1. Fiona Hunter Johnston (ONIT WRT); 2. E. Cockcroft (Bikeshed Exeter Uni); 3. R. Taylor (Manchester Wheelers); 4. G. Panchaud (Cycleworks.co.uk); 5. L. Burgess (Bristol South CC); 6. M. McFadzean (GB Cyles.co.uk); 7. H. Viles (Somerset RC-Bicycle Chain); 8. R. Waters (Performance Cycles); 9. H. Kaneko (Twickenham CC); 10. A. Sheehan (Bikeshed Exeter Uni).

Thursday, June 18

Staffordshire and Shropshire RR League 7 (Stourport, Worcestershire):

E, 1, 2, 3, 4 (Race one): 1. Greg Caley (Walsall RCC) 34m in 1:21.00; 2. K. Brady (Borntobike); 3. A. Holmes (Halesowen A & CC); 4. S. Byatt (Revolutions Racing); 5. S. Hammond (Wolverhampton Wheelers); 6. R. Smith (Wrekinsport CC); 7. T. Jones (Mid-Shropshire Wheelers); 8. G. Geehan (Wolverhampton Wheelers); 9. J. Tate (Beacon Roads CC); 10. J. Brisco (Wolverhampton Wheelers).
E, 1, 2, 3, 4 (Race two): 1. Jacob Tipper (Neon Velo) 34m in 1:18.00; 2. D. Jelfs (Madison-Genesis); 3. M. Bonehill (Mammoth Lifestyle); 4. P. Banham (Team Jewson); 5. I. Lee (RAF CC); 6. B. Mansfield-Yorke (Wolverhampton Wheelers); 7. G. Scott (Bicicielo); 8. J. Walker (Borntobike); 9. A. Neave (Stourbridge CC); 10. C. Allot (Fred Williams Cycles).

Redbridge Summer Series 7 (Redbridge circuit, Essex):

E, 1, 2 (1 hr plus 5 laps): 1. Louis Modell (Catford CC Equipe/Banks); 2. J. Jenkins (Southend Wheelers); 3. K. Noctor (Feather Cycles Racing); 4. J. Rix (Glendene CC); 5. S. Marshall; 6. J. Bowers (London Phoenix CC); 7. J. Butler (Hargroves Cycles); 8. M. Barningham (ViCiOUS VELO); 9. T. Beasley (East London Velo); 10. C. Cassell (Rapha Cycling Club).
3, 4: 1. Oliver Hedger (Personal Biketfit.com); 2. M. Anderson (Glendene CC); 3. N. Cooke (Sunday Echappee); 4. B. Goldsworthy (London Dynamo); 5. J. Ambrose-Parish (Lee Valley YCC); 6. M. Newsome (Durham Univ CC); 7. S. Revill-Darton (Sunday Echappee); 8. P. Manning (Strada Sport); 9. R. Saunders (Rapha Cycling Club); 10. G. Smith (Finsbury Park CC).

The year's fastest

10 MILES

	Rider	Time	Course	Date
1	Bradley Wiggins (Team Wiggins)	17.58	V718	16/05/15
2	S. Irwin (North Lancs RC)	18.40	V718	30/05/15
3	R. Bideau (Pendle Forest CC)	18.41	V718	30/05/15
4	D. Barnett (drag2zero.com)	18.49	V718	03/06/15
5	D. Barnett (drag2zero.com)	18.50	H10/17	30/05/15
6	M. Jones (drag2zero.com)	18.55	V718	17/06/15
7	A. Wareham (Team Swift)	19.01	V718	03/06/15
8	D. Barnett (drag2zero.com)	19.01	H10/8	17/06/15
=9.	E. Bradbury (Cambridge Univ CC)	19.01	V718	11/04/15
=9.	R. Pears (Procycling RT)	19.01	V718	30/05/15
=9.	M. Jones (drag2zero.com)	19.01	V718	03/06/15

25 MILES

	Rider	Time	Course	Date
1	Matt Bottrill (drag2zero.com)	46.30	A25/11	20/06/15
2	S. Irwin (North Lancs RC)	47.08	A25/11	20/06/15
3	A. Jackson (Team Swift)	47.16	A25/11	20/06/15
4	K. Davies (Team NBCC	47.19	R25/3h	26/04/15
5	M. Bottrill (drag2zero.com)	47.28	A25/11	11/04/15
=6	M. Bottrill (drag2zero.com	47.31	A25/11	09/05/15
=6	K. Davies (Team NBCC)	47.31	R25/7	10/05/15
8	R. Bideau (Pendle Forest CC)	47.48	A25/11	20/06/15
9	K. Davies (Team NBCC)	48.03	R25/3l	31/05/15
10	K. Davies (Team NBCC)	48.10	R25/3h	03/05/15

50 MILES

	Rider	Time	Course	Date
1	Dave Green (Team Velovelocity.co.uk)	1:40.32	E2/50c	13/06/15
2	P. Lawrence (Team Swift)	1:40.33	E2/50c	13/06/15
3	M. Bottrill (drag2zero.com)	1:41.22	J4/16	13/06/15
4	D. Lazenby (Baines Racing Silverstone CC)	1:42.00	E2/50c	13/06/15
5	A. Topham (High Wycombe CC)	1:42.18	H50/8	10/05/15
6	D. McGaw (Cambridge CC)	1:43.27	E2/50c	16/05/15
7	G. Taylor (Shorter Rochford RT)	1:43.45	E2/50c	13/06/15
8.	M. Smith (Team Velo Velocity)	1:43.48	F1/50b	10/05/15
9.	T. Pettinger (Sri Chinmoy CT)	1:43.59	H50/8	10/05/15
10.	R. Gifford (In-Gear Quickvit)	1:44.00	E2/50c	13/06/15

Women E, 1, 2, 3, 4: 1. Hayley Simmonds (Team Velosport) 1hr + 5 laps); 2. V. Collins (London Dynamo); 3. P. Dolejsova (London Phoenix CC); 4. C. Price; 5. E. Cadzow (PMR @ Toachim House); 6. T. McGee (London Phoenix CC).

Ilton Thursday Circuit Races round 4 (Merryfield, Somerset):

E, 1, 2, 3 (1hr): 1. Peter Howarth (Team Tor 2000); 2. J. Porter (Team Tor 2000); 3. J. Jones (Team Tor 2000); 4. J. Williams (Team Tor 2000); 5. J. Curson (Tro UK); 6. E. Davis (Team Tor 2000); 7. J. Davey (Velosure-Starley-Primal); 8. C. Revell (Somerset RC); K. Price (Tanks Direct Cycling); 10. J. Gray (Team Tor 2000).

Women E, 1, 2, 3, 4 (40min): 1. Sarah Godwin (Team Tor 2000); 2. E. Attfield (Velosure-Starley-Primal); 3. M. Whitehurst (VC St Raphael); 4. N. Carr (Somerset RC); 5. R. Cornwall (Taw Velo); 6. H. Viles (Somerset RC).

3rd cat (50min): 1. Evan Powell (Pontypool RCC); 2. R. Woodward (Somerset RC); 3. C. Gray (Gillingham and District Wh); 4. W. Hitchcroft (Somerset RC); 5. A. Fletcher (North Devon Wheelers); 6. T. Southcombe (Somerset RC); 7. S. Cavill (Somerset RC); 8. L. Barfoot (Tri UK); 9. J. Sibley (Ystwyth Cycling Club); 10. J. Croxton (Exeter Wheelers)

4th cat (50 mins) 1. Sam Nolan (unattached); 2. B. Millar (Cardiff University Marmots); 3. R. Jackson; 4. L. Thomas (Tri UK); 5. G. Biles; 6. B. Foxwell (First Chard Wheelers); 7. A. Master (Somerset RC); 8. B. Vowles (Somerset RC); 9. M. Williamson (Exeter Wheelers); 10. C. Francis (VC Bristol Wheelers of Warmley).

U16 boys: 1. Steven Jones (Tri UK); 2. J. Mitri (Dream Cycling); 3. J. West (First Chard Wh).

Wednesday, June 17

Garleton Trophy Road Race (East Lothian):

2, 3, 4: 1. Lewis Oliphant (Velo Club Edinburgh); 2. R. Grant (Velo Club Edinburgh); 3. A. Brown (Glasgow CT); 4. G. Martin (Spokes RT); 5. K. Barclay (Bicycleworks); 6. R. Yeoman (Spokes RT); 7. S. Gordon (Pro Vision); 8. J. Doig (Pedal Power RT); 9. P. Wakely (Edinburgh RC); 10. W. Hamilton (Velo Club Edinburgh).

Time trials

Sunday, June 21

Velo Club Baracchi 50 (Wortwell, Norfolk):

1. Joe Skipper (Rock Estate) ..... 1:46.39 (CR)
2. D. Bloy (Team VeloVelocity) 1:47.30
3. P. Jay (Team VeloVelocity) 1:55.11
4. A. Leggett (Team VeloVelocity) 1:55.14
5. J. Swindells (Iceni Velo) 1:55.45
6. A. Jardine (Ipswich BC) 1:58.57
7. Geoff Frost (Team VeloVelocity) 1:59.13
8. Oliver Milk (Tri-Anglia Triathlon Club) 1:59.25
9. D. Procter (Team VO2 Bikes) 2:00.30
10. Mark Richards (Velo Club Baracchi) 2:00.33
Vet on standard: Chris Nudds (CC Breckland) ..... +25:26
Woman: Anna Muir (Colchester Rovers) 2:11.15
Team: Team VeloVelocity

Eastbourne Rovers 25 (Maresfield, East Sussex):

1. Peter Tadros (InGear-Quickvit-Trainsharp RT) 52.39
2. S. Dennis (East Grinstead CC) 54.13
3. K. Lea (Paceline RT) 54.16
4. M. Emsley (Team ASL360) 54.29
5. G. Welfare (Eastbourne Rovers CC) 54.36
6. S. Kane (Team ASL360) 55.02
7. P. Morris (Team ASL360) 55.08
8. I. Brogden (Eastbourne Rovers CC) 55.49
9. C. Richardson (InGear-Quickvit-Trainsharp RT) 56.35
10. S. Kennett (PMR at Toachim House) 56.56
Woman: Katerina Avramides (Brighton Mitre CC) 1:08.49
Team: Team ASL360 (Mark Emsley, Steven Kane and Pete Morris) 2:44.39

Hinckley CRC 25 (Wolvey, Warwickshire):

1. James Perkins (Team Zenith) 53.51
2. D. Keirnan (Lutterworth Cycling Centre) 54.29
3. J. Evans (Madison-Genesis) 55.22
4. P. Klin (Coventry RC) 55.26
5. D. Mead (Hinckley CRC) 55.51
6. M. Jones (Team Sales Engine.co.uk) 56.06
7. J. Middleton (Media Velo) 56.09
8. A. Green (Lutterworth Cycle Centre) 56.10
9. C. Halford (Stourbridge Velo) 57.19
10. R. Gibbons (Hinckley CRC) 57.54
Veterans: David Keirnan
Women: Liz Powell (Mike Vaughan Cycles) 1:00.14

Saturday, June 20

Manchester and District TTA 50 (Goostrey, Cheshire):

1. Mark Nulty (Glossop Kinder Velo) 1:52.54
2. C. Siepen (Seamons CC) 1:53.39
3. N. Skellern (Team Swift) 1:55.55
4. P. Walker (Leigh Premier RC) 1:57.00
5. D. Mathers (Seamons CC) 1:58.29
6. A. Chorley (Seamons CC) 1:58.41
7. M. Tickle (Leigh Premier RC) 1:58.45
8. P. Warburton (Liverpool Phoenix CC) 1:58.49
9. C. Hayes (Liverpool Century RC) 1:58.56
10. N. Clementson (Wigan Wheelers) 1:59.08
Veteran: Neil Skellern
Woman: Heather Bamforth (The Racing Chance Foundation) 2:19.47

Yorkshire Road Club 25 (Topcliffe, North Yorkshire)

1. Anthony Bromley (Barnsley RC) 51.54
2. P. Thirling (Stockton Wheelers) 52.05
3. P. Barusevicus (All Terrain Cycles) 52.22
4. J. Brearley (City RC) 53.04
5. C. Donaldson (GS Metro) 53.21
6. M. Wontorowski (Albarosa CC) 53.29
7. R. Brennan (Preston CC) 53.36
8. M. Flannery (Richmond Tri Kudu) 53.41
9. C. Saint (Yorkshire RC) 53.44
10. D. Sleigh (Clifton CC) 54.35
Woman: Jessica Bacon (York Cycleworks) 56.45
Team: Yorkshire Road Club (Carl Saint, Kieran Savage, Stephen Mooring) 2:47.32

Walsall RCC 25 (Etwall, Derbyshire):

1. Matt Bottrill (Drag2zero.com) 46.30
2. S. Irwin (North Lancs RC) 47.08
3. A. Jackson (Team Swift) 47.16
4. R. Bideau (Pendle Forest CC) 47.48
5. A. Wareham (Team Swift) 48.49
6. D. Barnett (Drag2zero.com) 48.55
7= L. Tunnicliffe (Clay Cross RT) 48.58
7= J. Wainman (Team Swift) 48.58
9. M. Sinclair (Lutterworth Cycle Centre) 49.19
10. R. Dean (Barnsley RC) 49.22
Women: Karen Ledger (Langsett Cycles) 55.33

Rider of the week

Laura Massey (IKON-Mazda)

She held off four rivals from Giordana-Triton — including Women's Road Series leader Nicola Juniper — to take victory in Northumberland.



Newbury RC 10 (Kingston Bagpuize, Oxfordshire):

1. Tim Cartwright (Newbury RC) 19.53
2. R. West (RST Sport-Aero Coach) 19.57
3. B. Oliver (Nopinz) 20.51
4. J. Little (Velo Club St Raphael) 20.58
5. P. Watts (North Hampshire RC) 21.01
6. W. Grainger (Andover Wheelers) 21.14
7. A. Macinnes (RAF CA) 21.35
8. P. Oliver (Fairly United Cycling Team) 21.39
9. M. Bennett (Bicester Millennium CC) 21.41
10. S. Campbell (Twickenham CC) 21.45

Eastbourne Rovers CC 10 (East Hoathly, Sussex):

1. Peter Tadros (InGear-Quickvit-Trainsharp RT) 20.49
2. J. Donaldson (Neon Velo) 20.55
3. A. Atkinson (34 Nomads CC) 21.07
4. G. Welfare (Eastbourne Rovers CC) 21.19
5. S. Kane (Team ASL360) 21.23
6. P. Morris (Team ASL360) 21.40
7. I. Brogden (Eastbourne Rovers CC) 22.02
8. M. Emsley (Team ASL360) 22.13
9. C. Yates (East Grinstead CC) 22.14
10. H. Shaw (Eastbourne Rovers CC) 22.17
Veteran: Peter Tadros
Woman: Helen Bullimore (Trainsharp Racing Team) 25.58
Team: Team ASL360 (Steven Kane, Pete Morris and Mark Emsley) 1:05.38

Wednesday, June 17

Barnesbury CC 25 (Three Horse Shoes, Northumberland):

1. Keith Murray (Strategic Lions) 51.58
2. D. Grieves (GS Metro) 51.59
3. C. Donaldson (GS Metro) 52.25
4. B. Metcalf (Team Swift) 53.52
5. P. Hall (Breeze Bikes RT) 54.17
6. B. Lane (GS Metro) 54.37
7. L. McDermott (Breeze Bikes RT) 54.58
8. S. Clark (GS Metro) 55.04
9. N. Martin (Adept Precision RT) 55.11
10. I. Taylor (Ciclo Costa Blanca.com) 55.29
Women: Angela Hibbs (Team WattCycle) 56.58

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FRAMES



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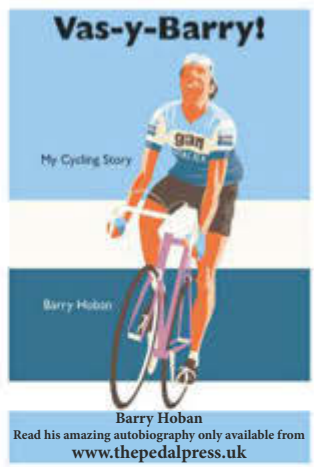
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Dr Hutch

Can you ever have too many bikes? Amazingly, the Doc thinks you can

doctorhutch_cycling@timeinc.com



Legend has it, a few months after Miguel Indurain retired, the five-time Tour de France winner went to a local shop to buy a bike. He left a few moments later, doubled over with laughter. It was so many years since he'd had to buy his own bike that he assumed the price he'd been quoted was a joke.

Of course, he went back and bought the bike. We all do. We can't help it. The old joke is that if the number of bikes you own is 'n', the number you need is 'n+1'.

But I think I've now added the last bike. I can't possibly need another one. I can stand in my garage and see bicycle after bicycle: hanging up, sitting about, packed neatly into boxes, or dismembered for parts and scattered all over the place. Worse still, I can go to the living room, kitchen, dining room, spare bedroom, office, or workshop and enjoy exactly the same view. Nothing but bicycles. It's like living outside a Danish railway station.

I crammed my new bike into the garage with trepidation. If you've ever seen the Mr Creosote scene in Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life* you'll know what I mean. That wafer-thin mint too much. I was expecting the garage to explode, scattering bits of bicycle across the village. Chains lassoing innocent children. Flying sprockets thudding into shed walls like throwing knives. Handlebars spinning like boomerangs.

The last one

I'll miss new bikes. The smell. The shine. That moment when you tighten up the seatpost clamp before your first ride and the Allen key slips and knocks a chunk out of the paintwork on the top tube.

Every new bike I've ever had has prompted a little crisis — do I want to ride it, or do I want to look at it? There is that wonderful cleanness, so fragile that it's gone within the



Adding one bike too many can have explosive consequences

Acts of Cycling Stupidity

Word reaches us of a rider who decided to follow half the advice offered in this column a few weeks ago. He tried using sodium bicarbonate to improve his performance in a recent high-profile time trial event.

On the basis that if the recommended 20g was good, 40g must be better, he doubled the dose.

And thus it came to pass that when the time he was due to roll down the ramp arrived, he was still locked in a portaloo, suffering what the medical literature usually describes as "a bottom that has turned into a fire-hose". At the point when he should have finished, he was still begging passers-by to fetch him loo rolls from other cubicles.

The half of the advice he ignored was to try the whole thing out in training.



first mile of riding. A few years ago, I tried to restore a bike to new condition after I'd ridden it for no more than about 10 minutes at a photo-shoot. New chain, new cassette, new bar tape, new tyres. I didn't come close to succeeding.

If, before I finally pluck up the purity of soul to ride it, I want to keep a new bike in the living room for a few days to drool over, I can. Mrs Doc gave up that territory long ago, and tried to hold a line no more aggressive than "no bikes in the bedroom". She's failed even at that; she's got chainring marks on her nightdress. ("You're going to end up on one of those Channel 4 documentaries," she said, darkly.)

It's unfortunate that my love of a new bike is matched only by my affection for an old one. I'm incapable of letting a bike go. Take, for instance, my first proper bike. It was such a dire machine that my second bike followed it by only about six weeks. The first one was of practical use only as a donor for small-diameter sewage pipes. I haven't ridden it since 1994. I still have it, though. Of course I do, it was my first bike.

I have three track bikes. I haven't raced on a track since 2009 — and if you think that is in any way relevant, you've no right to call yourself a cyclist. Throughout the house: relics, antiques, bits of total rubbish. It's like a giant metal bird has tried to build a nest.

I could sell some, I suppose. But I've no idea what I'd spend the money on.

"In my house, it's like a giant metal bird has tried to build a nest"



How to... ride cobbles



Cobbles: best ridden rarely

There are several approaches to riding over Paris-Roubaix-style cobbles. The best one is to use an adjacent road. However, if pride, curiosity, or UCI regulations mean you have to ride the cobbles, you could always try the following techniques. At least it will give you something to think about while you're waiting to crash.

One method is to ride on the very crown of the road, where there's less camber. However, the cobbles there will probably be at their roughest. Accept that your saddle might as well be attached to a pneumatic drill, and try not to hold the bars any harder than you have to. A white-knuckle death-grip should be quite sufficient.

Whenever you come to a huge hole in the road where a cobble is missing, be sure to ride into it and puncture. And remember that any puddle that appears on the cobbles is only there because there's a hole the size of a bucket below it, so be sure to ride into those too.

Alternatively, try to ride up the dirt between the road and the verge. This looks like a good option when the pros do it on TV, but you'll find that it keeps vanishing, forcing you onto the cobbles at their maximum camber, where they are at their most inconsistent.

If it's raining, you'd be best just throwing yourself head first at the cobbles while you still have a mobile phone signal with which to call for help.

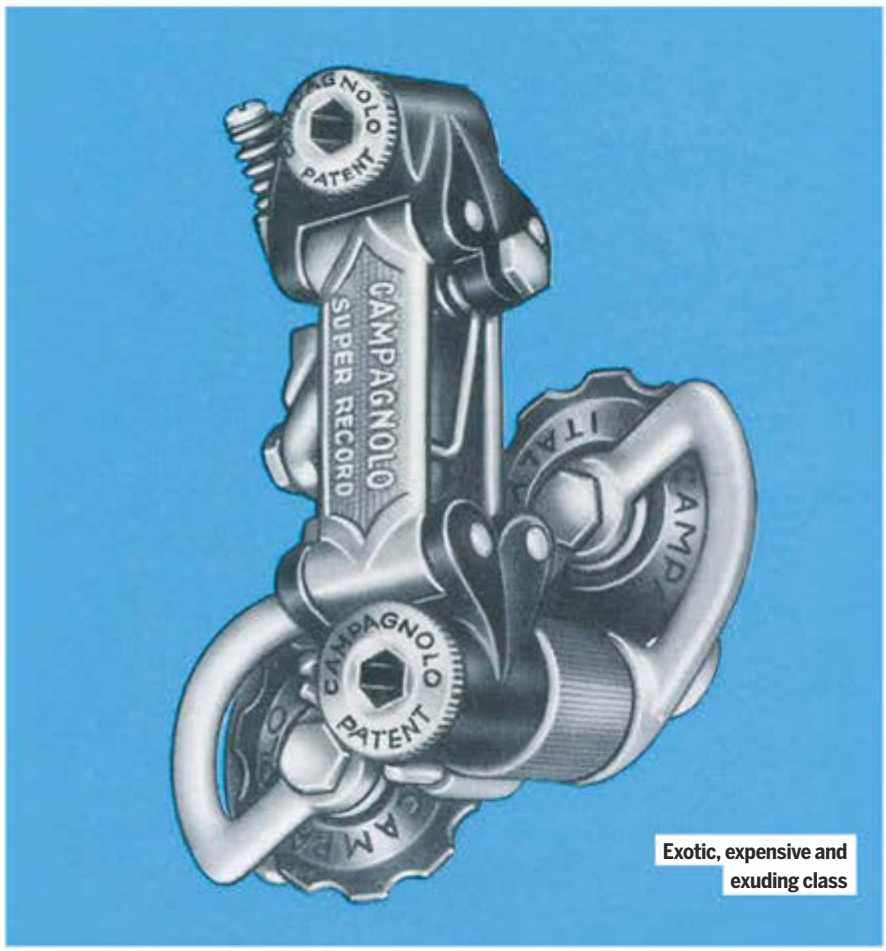
Campagnolo Super Record derailleur

Bike tech has never looked as classy as the Super Record when it first launched more than 40 years ago

Simon Smythe

It has been compared to a Breitling watch, and indeed if James Bond had used a bicycle to pursue his evil adversaries, there's no doubt Q would have equipped it with a Campagnolo Super Record rear derailleur. And we hope Q would have impressed upon the insouciant secret agent that it was under no circumstances to be returned scuffed, let alone crushed or bullet-riddled.

Although the Super Record did not double up as a Geiger counter, it certainly did radiate class. It was said to be made from materials more exotic than had ever before been seen in cycling. After all, when it was launched in 1973 man had first set foot on the moon just four years earlier, so it was reasonable to expect that NASA's technological innovations would be trickling down to Campagnolo running gear by now. And the Super Record derailleur was so expensive, and at 181 grams so super-light, that this certainly seemed feasible. It was in fact made from aluminium (albeit with titanium bolts) like its predecessor, the Nuovo Record — the first aluminium derailleur — with black anodised pivots, but the elegance and style it exuded were priceless. A revised version with the new 'script' logo, smoother, more modern styling and a reworked pulley cage arrived in 1978 to similar acclaim.



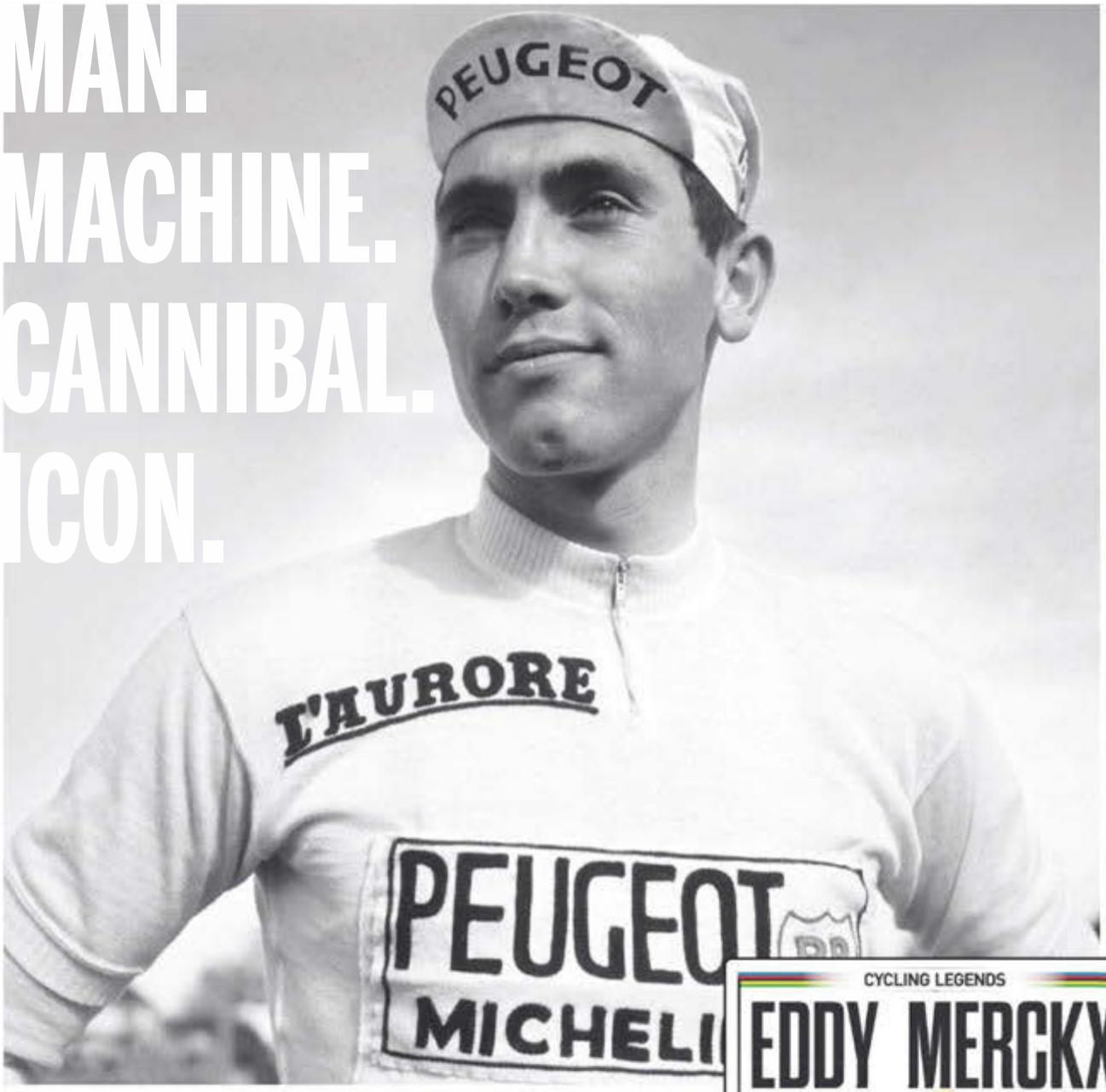
Exotic, expensive and exuding class

The ultimate expression

Tullio Campagnolo had launched the quick-release lever in 1930, having struggled to undo wing nuts with frozen fingers on top of a mountain three years earlier. His first derailleur, which arrived 10 years later, was literally an extension of his QRs. The Campagnolo Cambio Corsa used two rods and levers mounted on the right seatstay: one to move the chain between sprockets and the other to release the wheel so it could move backwards or forwards in the notched dropouts to take up chain slack. Gino Bartali famously — and some might say astonishingly — used the system to win the Tour de France in 1948.

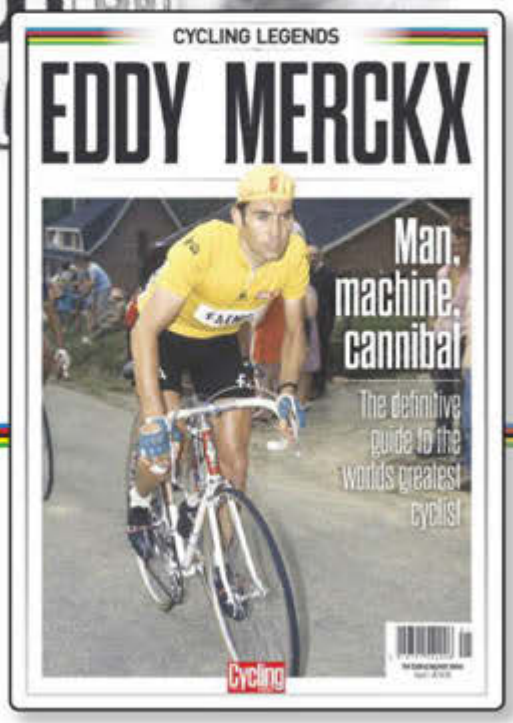
Campagnolo launched its first deformable-parallelogram derailleur, the Gran Sport, in 1950 — in response to French company Simplex's new parallelogram system — and the Italian company dominated racing with this and its successor the Nuovo Record until the arrival of the Super Record 23 years later.

The 1973 Super Record, made of 'rocket' aluminium with titanium bolts instead of the chrome-plated brass of the Gran Sport, was the ultimate expression of that classic original design. It, and the accompanying Super Record groupset, was superseded in 1984 by the radical but arguably much less pretty C-Record — though a final version was produced until 1987.



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